CORTEX™

System Role Playing Game

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Dedication: This book is dedicated to the memory of my friend, Richard Wilhite. He was there for me with an easy smile, a contagious laugh, and he had my back when I needed it. I know that you're playing out there somewhere, and when the time is right I'll be joining you.

CORTEX™

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PREFACE

On page 10 of the 1st edition *AD&D Dungeon Masters Guide* is a graph mapping the bell curve generated by a 3d6 roll. That chart gave me something of a start the first time I saw it, back in 1979 or 1980. There I was, a fledgling Dungeon Master, opening the pages of the *DMG* for my first time, expecting arcane secrets and coming face to face almost immediately with a math table. It was something like discovering the telephone number of a doughnut shop hidden within the text of the *Necronomicon.* It lent to the *DMG* the faint aroma of a cookbook. Still, something about that chart stuck with me.

Shortly thereafter, my game group abandoned *AD&D* to adopt *The Fantasy Trip,* which almost entirely involved 3d6 rolls, I found myself calculating the way a +1 bonus changed dramatically in significance from the middle of that curve to either end, as well as the way rolling 4d6 bunched results into a steeper, more predicable curve, and 5d6 into an even steeper one.

At the same time, I couldn't help but notice how much fun it was to clatter multiple dice together in your hand before rolling—something *AD&D* missed. Still, those polyhedral dice of *AD&D* were awfully sexy.

Let those ideas simmer for a dozen plus years, from my first days as a game *master* to a full-time position as a game *designer* at TSR, and early discussions with Bill Slavicsek about the direction for a future 3rd edition *AD&D*. I argued for adding skill rolls to the game, based on the standard d20 THAC0 roll, but adding other-sized dice to increase the difficulty. You can see a result of those discussions on page 48 of the *Alternity Player's Handbook.*

Stir in a few more years of playing and writing games, and along came the opening discussions of Larry Elmore's *Sovereign Stone* RPG. I'd been invited to take part in the system design (thank you Margaret and Larry) and made a suggestion based on gamers' love of polyhedral dice, and of clacking dice together in their hands before rolling. Designate one die to represent a character attribute and the other to represent a related skill, and you have the beginnings of the game now in your hands. It has, of course, benefited greatly from the insightful development skills of Jamie Chambers since that inception.

And there you have the recipe for one role playing game design. Feel free to add your own garnish before serving to your game group.

—Lester Smith

INTRODUCTION

Thanks for checking out the *Cortex System Role Playing Game*. This book provides a foundation for storytelling in many genres and styles—from sci-fi action to fantasy mystery to historical horror and almost anything else you can think of.

There are plenty of RPGs (role playing games) on the shelves. What makes this one different? Well, it could be that you want a game that provides an accurate simulation of combat. You might be looking for a game with an extremely balanced mathematical curve. Or maybe you want a game where the dice and mechanics are cutting-edge and innovative, like nothing ever attempted in an RPG before now.

If the above applies to you, put the book down and walk away. Seriously! Gaming comes with personal preferences and style, and we don't want you going into this with false expectations.

So if we know what Cortex isn't, you might want to know what it is. Our goal with this RPG is to blend easy-to-learn and fast-playing game mechanics with a focus on characters. The rules provide a nice solid skeleton that can be used to support the real meat of our game—the story. And we keep the dice rolling easy to understand and the math simple (Hey, some of us count with our fingers!). Pace is important to us, so even a big fight scene should move along at a fast clip. We also want something that makes non-combat characters just as important—and fun—as the fighters and gun-bunnies.

These rules are completely embedded in some of our very popular licensed RPGs, and it wasn't long before folks stripped our rules out and started using them to run fantasy, historical adventure, horror, and more. Others began asking us if we were ever going to publish the rules as a stand-alone game. You're reading our answer.

Most games are a labor of love, and the *Cortex System Role Playing Game* is no exception. It is our hope that you make this game your own. Play it, experiment with it, and run wild. Challenge yourself to do things that we could never have imagined on our own. And above all … have fun!

Cortex Rules

The rest of this book will give you the full shake-down of the rules, but here we're going to tell you what they are for—which boils down to two things: (1) Understand your character, and (2) Help tell the story. If you find that one of the rules is getting in the way of one of those things, then something is going wrong. Most things about a character, like how smart or strong your character is, or how proficient he is at a particular skill, are represented by dice. Roll the dice, add 'em up, and tell the Game Master your result to find out whether you succeed or fail, and what happens next.

Sound simple? It's meant to be, as well as flexible and fast-moving. New players can get up to speed quickly and experienced players can focus on their characters and what they want to do within the story instead of min-maxing, crunching numbers, and rules lawyering.

Characters & Setting

You're a machete-toting explorer battling dinosaurs and serpent men in a steamy jungle dotted with ancient ruins. Or you could be a hotshot World War I fighter pilot hunting down the Red Baron while trying to resolve a long-lasting vendetta when not in the cockpit. A 1950s gumshoe might be more your speed, solving cases while smoking cigars and taking swigs of single-malt Scotch. Any of these are setting and character concepts that could work for a Cortex System game. The group should agree on a basic setting and game concept and then use it as a basis to create characters appropriate to the genre and storyline that the Game Master has in mind.

One thing we really recommend is the idea of creating characters as a group. While you can certainly have everyone create characters in total isolation, it's always fun to create a good mix of characters that have a mix of useful talents and skills, as well histories and personalities that will keep things interesting. By having everyone sit down together and work on their ideas, it's much easier to have a group that will be a lot of fun to play later on.

Adventures & Campaigns

There are a few different ways to experience the Cortex System. One is to simply play through one storyline, often called an **adventure**. One-shot games can be a lot of fun, and are much like watching a movie-of-the-week. Since the story isn't planned for the long-term, no one is safe and the players can be comfortable in pushing limits.

Most RPG groups generally enjoy a long series of stories using the same setting and characters. This is called a **campaign**. Character death is usually more rare (but not unheard of!) in campaign-style play, and there is plenty of time to get familiar with the story, the setting, and most especially, the characters. This is more like enjoying a long-running television series with extended story arcs, and is often very memorable for the players involved.

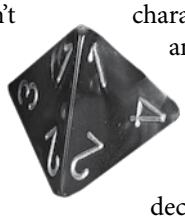
What's In This Book?

Here's what you'll find in the *Cortex System Role Playing Game*.

- **Introduction**—You're reading it!
- **Chapter One: Game Basics**—These are the only rules you need to understand as a player, and give you a foundation of the primary concepts you'll need a handle on if you plan to run a game as a Game Master.
- **Chapter Two: Characters**—Here we teach you how to create characters and how they can improve through game-play.
- **Chapter Three: Traits and Skills**—This section covers the elements that define your character. Traits represent the positive and negative aspects that influence your actions, while Skills represent your training.
- **Chapter Four: Gear**—Here you will find example equipment, armor, and weapons, as well as guidelines for expanding this list for your own campaign.
- **Chapter Five: Rules**—This chapter gives a full explanation of the game rules, including combat, chases, the use of vehicles, damage, healing, and more.
- **Chapter Six: Window Dressing**—While the rules offer you a way to run a believable story mostly based in our own world, this chapter shows you how to create custom campaigns that use magic, fantastic technology, psychic powers, and other extraordinary elements.
- **Chapter Seven: Building Worlds & Telling Tales**—The rules give you the nuts and bolts of game play, but this is the section for Game Masters to understand how the rules interact with the story and how to run a game with style.
- **Chapter Eight: Example Campaigns** - Here we offer three possibilities for Cortex System games, though they are just the tip of the iceburg.
- **Chapter Nine: Allies and Adversaries**—A chapter including many stock characters, critters, monsters, and villains.

CHAPTER 1
GAME BASICS

The game rules here are fast and easy to learn, meant to be exciting and fun while staying out of the way of telling a good story. After all, if you're busy figuring all your modifiers instead of thinking about what your character is doing or saying then you probably won't be having as much fun. And if you're planning on participating as a player, you don't even need to know the full depth of the rules. Just familiarize yourself with the basics in this chapter and you'll be more than prepared to play.



What's a Role Playing Game?

The Cortex System is a **role playing game**; it's a toolbox of sorts, a framework with which to tell a story. You get a group of your friends together, either at the table or online, and agree upon the story's setting. You'll need dice, a copy of this book, pens or pencils, and scratch paper. One of the players is the **Game Master** and comes up with a reasonable adventure plot (either prepared in advance or made up on the fly), the rest of the players create suitable **characters** and then the action starts. It's really as simple as that, but you'll want to get a fairly good understanding of the rules before you get that far.

What You Need

To play games using the Cortex System, you'll need:

- Pencils and character sheets.
- Polyhedral dice of different kinds: two-sided (d2), four-sided (d4), six-sided (d6), eight-sided (d8), ten-sided (d10), and twelve-sided (d12). You can find these at most hobby shops, game stores, and online vendors. If need be, coins can be used for d2s, blank dice can be bought and modified, or you can visit *www.margaretweis.com* to order some.
- A group of friends, including one Game Master and any number of players, though three to five players are recommended.
- A good place to relax and play comfortably.

The Players

Watch any movie or television show, read a comic or a novel, and you'll see that each has one or more central characters that drive all the action. Role playing games have their own version. **Player characters** are the characters under the player's control. They're the stars, and through them the players make decisions, take actions, and endure the consequences that shape the heart of the story.

Being a player means interacting with the Game Master's **supporting characters**, making decisions that will affect them as well as the other players, and when necessary rolling the dice to see how things turn out. It's your responsibility to be true to your character's persona while working together with the other players and the Game Master to keep things moving along. It's very much like improvisational theater; quite often, despite having created a character in advance, you won't have a vivid image of them in your head until the story is in full swing, and that's okay. In fact, that's a good thing.

The Game Master

Part referee, part casting director, the Game Master takes care of presenting the world the player characters live in as vibrantly and as fully as possible. Of course, without a special effects budget or a room full of character actors, the Game Master's resources are somewhat different from a movie or TV director. In addition, the Game Master is only in control of the supporting characters, not the player characters, so much of the drama comes from setting up situations and staging challenges so that the players can bring their characters to life.

The Game Master needs to know the rules better than the other players, if only because it is his job to adjudicate the rules and make judgment calls on the outcome of the players' actions. Being fair and objective is crucial; the Game Master isn't the opposition, he just rolls the dice for them. While it's important that the Game Master has fun running the game, it shouldn't be at the expense of the players.

The Dice

The Cortex System uses polyhedral dice, common to other role playing games and available from your local hobby store or online hobby vendor. Dice

form an ascending scale of ability and are assigned to Attributes, Skills, and Traits. Each die type, from two-sided (d2) up through twelve-sided (d12), represents a "step" on this scale. Higher steps, in general, represent greater ability, skill, damage, or whatever; a d6 is better than a d4, and a d8 is better than a d6. This scale can even extend above d12. At that point, a second die is added, making the next step "d12 + d2." That makes the first eight steps as follows:

d2, d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, d12+d2, d12+d4

There is, theoretically, no upper limit, though it would be rare for anything to have a rating higher than d12 to begin with.

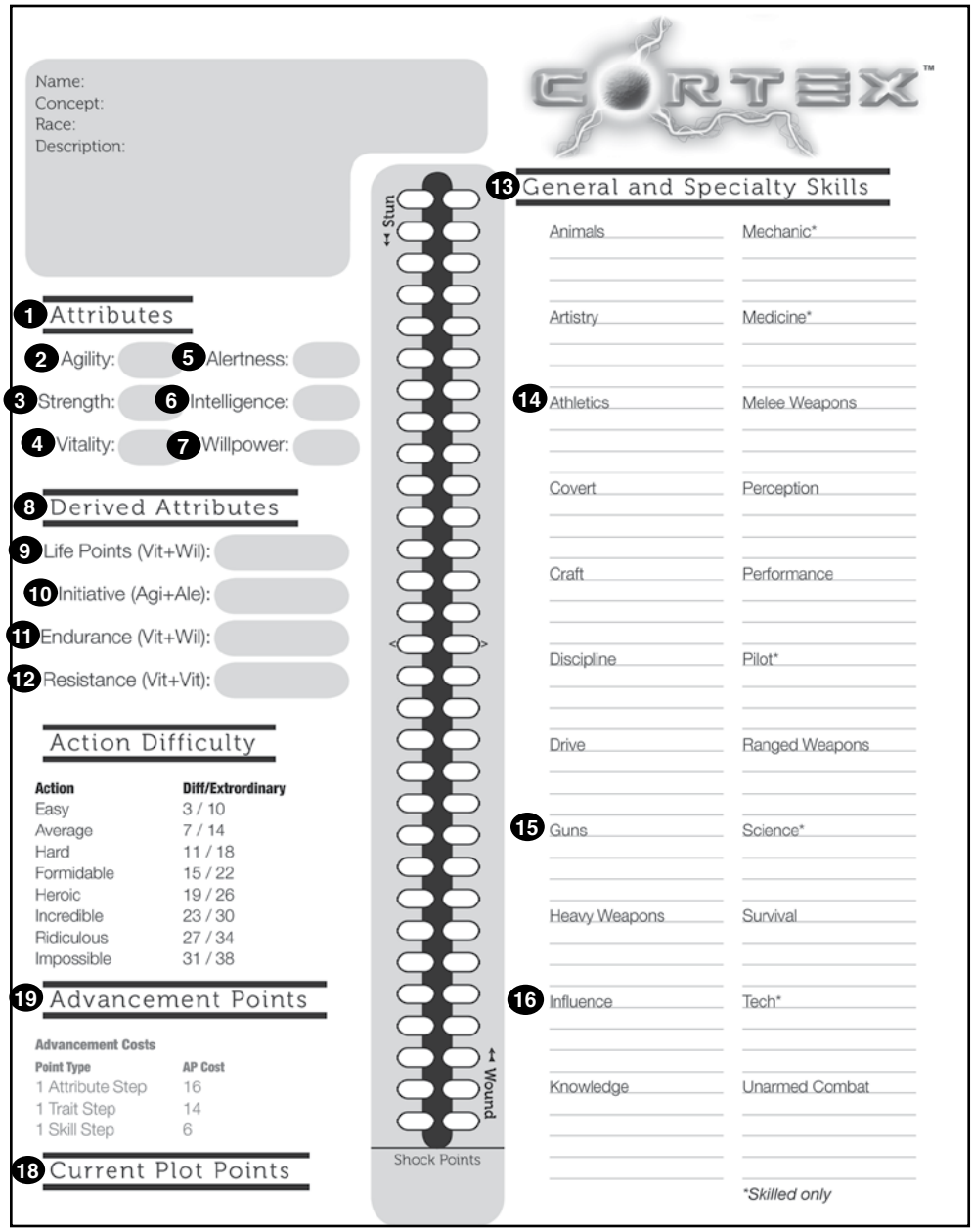
Most actions call for an Attribute die and a Skill die to be rolled and the results added together. If your character doesn't have the right Skill (but is still allowed to try it—some actions require the proper training), roll only the Attribute. The character might have a Trait that helps out, or even more than one Trait. And if that doesn't seem like it'll be enough, there are ways to influence the outcome by spending Plot Points to gain a bonus die.

Changes to rolls that make tasks harder or easier are called step modifiers, and described in terms of positive and negative steps. These modifiers move the die type up or down the scale. For example, a –1 step would turn a d6 into a d4; a +2 step would turn a d6 into a d10, and so on. While dice can be reduced below d2, at that point they become negated entirely (d0), and any further penalty is ignored.

The Rules & the Story

First and foremost, this game is supposed to be fun. You're telling a story, hopefully one that's full of drama, tension, humor, and action. The rules are meant to support this idea, but there are rare times when they get in the way or just don't cover some crazy idea that the players might come up with. Just remember that the story should come first—wing it using the basic game mechanics, and when in doubt, give the players the edge in a given situation.

We've designed the game to be flexible and relatively simple. There isn't a special rule to cover every situation that might occur, but the system allows Game Masters to easily find a way to resolve anything, without having to memorize books and books of specific information. If you are the Game Master for your group, take extra time to go over the information provided here, and you should be able to deal with anything your players throw at you.



Your Character Sheet

A character sheet holds all the game information about your character. Some people copy the printed sheet from the back of the rulebook, others print out a PDF, while many just write down their information on a piece of scratch paper and eschew printed sheets altogether. What's important is that you have all the necessary information ready at hand while you're playing the game, so that you don't have to spend time flipping through the rulebook or shrugging your shoulders at the Game Master when he asks you what your Initiative is or whether you have any Complications that might come into play.

17 Assets

17 Complications

Weapons

Type: Damage:
Range: Ammo:

Type: Damage:
Range: Ammo:

Type: Damage:
Range: Ammo:

Armor

Type:
Armor Rating:
Covers:
Penalty:

Gear

Plot Points and Die Steps

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
d2	d4	d6	d8	d10	d12	d12+d2	d12+d4	d12+d6	d12+d8	d12+d10	d12+d12

Attributes (1)

Your character has six primary **Attributes**, listed below. These represent broad areas of ability that your character possesses, and are rated in terms of the type of die you roll when your character is using that Attribute. Dice of a higher step represent greater ability than lower step dice, so an Attribute of d8 is much better than an Attribute of d4.

While characters could possibly have Attributes of anything d2 or higher, d2 is a crippling deficiency, and d12 is the extremely high end of normal human potential. Most characters have Attributes that average around d6, which represents a moderate score for a human adult. Of course, supernatural creatures, cyborgs, aliens, and other characters that fall outside of the norm may have Attributes much, much higher than this.

Most of the time, when the Game Master calls for a roll, you will roll at least one of your character's Attributes, usually in combination with another die (either another Attribute or a Skill). Which Attribute or Skill use is determined by the situation. Generally, common sense gives an obvious choice, but the Game Master has the final word on which Attribute to use in a given situation.

Agility (2) represents your character's grace, quickness, kinesthetic sense, and hand-eye coordination. A high Agility gives him an edge with most skills that involve movement, fine control, aiming, and so on.

Strength (3) is your character's physical brawn. High Strength lets your character deal more damage with hand weapons, carry more, run harder, and the like.

Vitality (4) is a measure of your character's health and fitness. A higher Vitality keeps him from catching colds, helps him avoid getting tired, and lets him resist poisons.

Alertness (5) indicates how aware your character is, whether it's of somebody's body language,

the environment, or a hidden clue. A high Alertness tells him when someone is lying, acting strangely, or sneaking up on him.

Intelligence (6) represents the ability of your character to work out puzzles, think clearly, or understand things. A high Intelligence lets him figure out the answer to difficult riddles, win chess games, and crack codes.

Willpower (7) is the strength of your character's psyche—his personal drive, inner fire, and determination. A high Willpower lets your character live when he should die, persuade others with the sheer force of his personality, and resist intimidation or fear.

Derived Attributes (8)

Listed below your six Attributes on your character sheet are four secondary values derived from them. These are called **Derived Attributes**, and they represent certain specific aspects of your character that come into play during dramatic scenes.

Life Points (9) are Vitality + Willpower, expressed as a total of the maximum results of both dice. Life Points are used to track injury.

Initiative (10) is Agility + Alertness. You roll this during combat scenes to determine the order in which your character acts.

Endurance (11) is Vitality + Willpower. This roll is used, among other things, when your character is fighting for his life and near death.

Resistance (12) is Vitality + Vitality. This roll comes into play when your character is fighting something off, from the toxic breath of an alien monster to a bad case of the flu.

Skills (13)

In addition to Attributes, your character also has **Skills**—ratings that determine how well trained or experienced he is in different fields. When attempting to do something that falls under one of these categories, you roll your character's Skill die (which is rated in the same way as an Attribute, except that Skills have no minimum level) in addition to an Attribute. Also, like Attributes, a d6 in a Skill represents a moderate level of competency, and a d12 is extremely good.

Some Skills may be used even if your character has no training in them, but others can't be used unless he has them at a rating of at least d2. These are usually specialized fields of knowledge, or Skills that are extremely dangerous—constructing a thermonuclear device or performing surgery are not things that can be tried untrained with any hope of success.

Because there are too many Skills to list fully here, your character's sheet includes the general Skill list; more information can be found in **Chapter Three: Traits and Skills**. However, to give you an example, three Skills that your character might possess are Athletics, Guns, and Influence:

Athletics (14) represents just that; it would be used for any action that involved active movement, possibly some that involve physical fitness or endurance, and so on. Swimming, jumping, running, and dodging all fall under the category of Athletics.

Guns (15) covers most ranged hand-weapons like pistols, rifles, submachine guns, energy blasters, and the like, though it would not be used for rocket launchers or something on that scale (that would be the Heavy Weapons Skill instead). Guns would be rolled when shooting, cleaning, or identifying any of the weapons listed above.

Influence (16) would be your character's ability to persuade others, whether it is through fast-talking, clever public speaking, or seduction. It would also help him lie convincingly, write a good speech, and intimidate someone.

Traits (17)

Your character should be much more than a collection of numbers. While in the terms of the Cortex System most things that describe your character may be thought of as Attributes and Skills, sometimes he has less definable qualities. Is he half-human, half-faerie? Does he assume he's so badass he can't lose? If he dies, does he always come back again? These are the kinds of things we call **Traits**.

Traits are broken down into two categories: **Assets**, which are generally positive Traits, and **Complications**, which are generally negative. Traits are rated according to a die type much like Attributes and Skills, although not all Traits have the same range of possible steps; some are only available at one die.

Traits have a variety of different effects. Some provide a bonus or penalty to actions by letting you add the Trait's die to the roll. Others allow occasional rerolls for failed results or change the basic rules in some other way. This rulebook contains a broad range of Traits, but each Cortex System campaign setting should have its own unique Assets and Complications specific to the needs of the genre that is represented.

Plot Points (18)

Your sheet should also have a space for recording your **Plot Points**. These are the currency of drama in our game system. They're used for a variety of things, such as keeping your character alive or improving his chance of succeeding at actions. In a sense, they're a means of changing the story and empowering you as a player.

Plot Points may be spent *before* a roll to **add an extra die** to your roll. The more points spent, the bigger the die—a single Plot Point adds a d2, two Plot Points add a

d4, and so on. You may also spend points after a roll, but at reduced effectiveness; each Plot Point spent afterward adds 1 to the total result on the dice. Just remember that you always get at least as many points as you spent added to your roll.

You can spend Plot Points to **reduce damage**, turning a fatal or incapacitating injury into just a flesh **wound**. When damage is declared, you may opt to spend Plot Points to buy a bonus die just like when you try to improve actions, but this time the result is subtracted from the damage.

Finally, you may spend Plot Points to have some measure of narrative control over the game world itself. This is called **story manipulation**, or "scene editing." Depending on the number of Plot Points you choose to spend, you may insert an element into the current scene—add in a relationship between a supporting character and your character that didn't exist (and is thus only now revealed), or suggest to the Game Master that there's a well-placed tank of gasoline near the villain's car, and a lucky shot with your 9 mm might cause it to explode—the effects and extent of this use of Plot Points are up to you and your Game Master.

Although you can't have more than 12 Plot Points at a time, and you'll want to spend them a lot, you're going to find that playing up your Complications and sticking to your character's personality will ensure a constant supply.

Actions

When you want your character to try and shoot a rampaging dinosaur, reroute a starship's power source, or jump a chasm while running from jungle natives, you are performing an **action** that might fail, and might well do so with dramatic consequences. In the Cortex System, these actions are resolved by rolling dice. The exact dice to be rolled usually depend upon your character's relevant Attributes and Skills; what happens after the roll depends upon what type of action your character is attempting.

Simple Actions

Most actions are **simple actions**. The Game Master decides which Attribute and Skill combination (or, in some exceptional cases, an Attribute and another Attribute) is most appropriate for that particular action in that situation. Roll the dice and add the results together. If the total is higher than the **Difficulty** set by the Game Master then your character succeeds. The Game Master sets the Difficulty based on how difficult the situation is supposed to be.

Most simple actions represent all that your character is doing in each game turn. Occasionally, you may need to do more than one action at a time, which imposes step penalties. Some things take up very little time or concentration, such as shouting a command or flipping a switch, and these don't require a dice roll or a simple action.

This is a simple method of resolution, but you can take advantage of how flexible it is. The rules never permanently pair a single Attribute with any Skill, so it's up to the Game Master to think about the specific situation and then choose an Attribute and Skill pairing. This allows the rules to accommodate a broad range of possible scenarios and be adapted easily to almost anything.

For example, you could roll Agility + Athletics to see how quickly your character runs through a patch of dense foliage (since he needs to take care not to trip or get entangled in the brush). Then again, you would roll Strength + Athletics when your character runs across an open field, when sheer muscle power is more important than grace and precision. Finally, should that open field turn out to be a minefield, you might be rolling Alertness + Athletics to see if your character crosses it safely.

Complex Actions

Some actions require more time to complete, which means you'll be making rolls over successive turns in order to reach a higher Difficulty (called a **Threshold**). These complex actions are detailed more fully in **Chapter Five: Rules**. There's an increased chance of failure, but that's the price of drama.

Unskilled Rolls

When your character doesn't have the right Skill, you just roll his Attribute. General Skills are very broad, but they don't cover everything. The Game Master might allow you to use a related Skill instead of the most appropriate one, especially if you can provide a justification for it, but no Skill should become a replacement for all the others. Remember also that some actions require actual training to be attempted at

Table 1.1: Difficulties

Action	Difficulty	Extraordinary Success
Easy	3	10
Average	7	14
Hard	11	18
Formidable	15	22
Heroic	19	26
Incredible	23	30
Ridiculous	27	34
Impossible	31	38

all. Surgery, computer programming, and other highly specialized fields are examples of these "trained only" Skills.

Opposed Actions

Sometimes you wind up acting directly against an opponent. When this happens, it's called an **opposed action**. It doesn't really matter how well the two opponents perform so long as one does it better than the other. Each character makes an appropriate roll, and the one with the highest total scores a win. Ties mean no clear winner is established and the contest continues into the next turn, unless the circumstances change.

In some cases, both characters roll the same Attribute and Skill. In others, different combinations are called for. As in all actions, the Game Master considers the situation and decides what each character has to roll.

Some events seem like opposed rolls but really aren't. If the action directly pits one character against another, use opposed rolls. If a minimum level of success exists, however, it's just two people making unopposed rolls and seeing who does better—for example, playing darts. Each character is rolling to hit the dartboard, so they each make separate, unopposed rolls against a Difficulty. After all, they might both hit the bull's-eye!

Botches & Extraordinary Successes

A **botch** is a roll where all the dice come up 1. This means that your character has royally screwed something up, and it's usually up to the Game Master to determine how. An **extraordinary success**, on the other hand, is when you not only beat the Difficulty, but your total is 7 or more points greater. In this case, you've scored a near-perfect result and the Game Master might throw some fringe benefits your way.

Combat

While most actions can be resolved very simply using the above set of rules, combat gets a little more complicated. The basics are the same, but because so many additional factors are involved the combat rules require a little more attention to specifics.

Combat Turn—Initiative, Movement, & Action

Combat is broken down into **combat turns** (or simply, **turns**) each of which is approximately three seconds long. During a turn, each character acts, what they do is resolved, and then the next turn begins. This repeats until the combat is over, which is usually when one side surrenders or is destroyed.

The order that characters act in is called the **Initiative order**. The character with the highest Initiative result goes first; their player (or the Game Master, if it's a supporting character) declares what the character is doing, the action is resolved, and the character with the next highest Initiative takes his turn. In the case of ties, player characters go before supporting characters, and, if necessary, tied characters can roll their Agility dice until an order is established.

When it's your character's Initiative turn, he has the opportunity to both move and act. You can choose to move or act first, and need not do both; however, moving only allows the character to travel up to 15 feet at a fast walk. If you want him to go farther, you can choose to run; running takes up their action for the turn, so they will not be able to attack, dodge, or perform other actions, but it allows them to move up to 30 feet in one turn.

Each turn, as long as he isn't running, your character can also perform one action. This could be used to make an attack, dodge to avoid an attack, attempt to kick down a door, or any number of other things. Most simple actions can be performed in one combat turn, but unless a complex action only takes one turn per roll (which is unusual) they are out of the question.

Life Points & Damage

When any character in the Cortex System is hurt, they take damage. Your character's **Life Points** represent the amount of damage he can withstand. Whenever your character takes damage, it may come in one of three types: **Basic**, **Stun**, or **Wound** damage. Stun represents concussions, fatigue, physical stress, and having the wind knocked out of you. Wound is more serious and represents actual bodily harm, cuts, broken bones, and internal bleeding. Basic damage combines the two and is divided equally into Stun and Wound, favoring Stun. Basic is the most common outcome of any attack, though some attacks cause Stun or Wound damage exclusively. Once any Basic damage is properly divided, you record how much Stun or Wound you've taken and compare this to your Life Point total. Take too much Stun damage, and your character is knocked out. Take too much Wound damage, and you're dead.

Attacking & Defending

During combat, even if your character didn't initiate it, he's likely to want to avoid any harm to himself as much as he wants to inflict harm on his opponent. We represent this with attack and defense actions.

The basics of an attack are very simple: An attack roll is a simple action with a Difficulty set by the target's defense. If the attack roll is equal to or higher than the defense, then the attack hits, and damage is determined.

Attacks

There are as many different ways to attack as there are people and weapons. However, for ease of use, the Cortex System breaks them down into a handful of combat Skills: Guns, Melee, Unarmed, and so forth. Whenever a character makes an attack, they use one of these Skills (if they have the appropriate one) and an Attribute for their attack roll. The Attribute used will often be Strength for close combat relying on brute force, or Agility for an attack made at range, but as with any Skill these are not set-in-stone pairings.

Making an attack uses the character's action for that combat turn, but it may force the target to spend their action while Defending, leaving them open to further attacks and unable to make one of their own. An attack isn't necessarily a single swing or thrust with a sword—it could represent a string of quick movements, foot shuffles, and a jab or two—but it does represent an effort on the part of your character to inflict harm on his opponent.

Defenses

When your character is attacked, you'll want to know what defense is available to him, and that depends heavily upon the situation and your decisions.

If your character is surprised, asleep, restrained, or otherwise completely unmoving for some reason, he is an Easy target—with a defense automatically set to 3. Sneaking up on an enemy provides a significant advantage!

If your character is actively engaged in combat, moving around even a little bit (even if he isn't aware of the attack), and isn't using his action to defend—perhaps you've already used his action for the turn to attack or defend, or you're waiting to attack when his Initiative comes up—then he uses his Innate defense. You roll your character's Agility die, with no Skill, and use the result as the new Difficulty for the attack roll. This does mean that the result could be lower than 3! Such a thing would be unfortunate, but that's the problem with random chance. Sometimes you accidentally blunder *into* an attack.

If your character has not yet used his action, and he's aware that the attack is coming, he could spend his action during that turn to defend himself. This would give him a normal Skill roll for his defense. Depending upon the type of attack, he could choose either to block or to dodge.

Against melee weapons or unarmed attacks (not guns or heavy weapons) your character has the option of using his Melee or Unarmed Skill to block, along with either Agility or Strength. Dodging is a little more versatile, and is useful against any kind of attack; your character dodges using his Agility + Athletics. Of course, dodging doesn't help you to *inflict* damage—only avoid it.

To Roll or Not to Roll ...

Rolling dice is part of the fun, but if there's too much rolling, the story disappears. One of the first things you need to learn is when to roll—which is the Game Master's call, but it helps for the players to understand, too.

Walking down the corridor, pouring a cup of coffee, packing a suitcase—none of these actions can be messed up easily. They should happen in the normal course of the game and be finished with quickly; the story moves along. There's no need to worry about their success.

Some actions have a chance of failure, but aren't meaningful to the storyline. This is especially bad when rolling the dice and failing it would only serve to derail the plot. For example, think about a long cross-country drive. Things can and do go wrong in even the most routine trips, and the longer the drive, the more likely it is. It's the same with basic maintenance on dangerous weapons and firearms, or injecting someone with an antidote, or negotiating with your creditors. Despite the chance of failure, if pausing to determine success, or the consequences of blowing it, is irrelevant to the storyline, don't roll. Just let it happen and move on. Even if there's a good chance of failure, your Game Master may not ask for a roll. Noticing a crucial clue in the ruins of a temple is not easy, but if the plot requires it, it's going to happen—the drama isn't about players making characters that can roll high on certain checks, it's about the story they tell by making choices. Of course, the same applies when the plot requires that the characters fail—hopefully this doesn't happen too often, but remember: The story comes first.

To sum it up, two factors must exist before any roll is made. First, the chance of success must be meaningful. Second, failure should not delay the game or play havoc with the story.

Calculating Damage

When an attack roll is equal to or greater than the defense, it's a hit, and the difference between the roll and the Difficulty of the defense translates directly into damage. In some cases, the attacker may also roll a damage die and add that to figure out the final damage. Weapons list the damage die they provide. Basic damage is divided in two, with half applied as Stun and the other half as Wound (rounding in favor of Stun). Most unarmed combat has an effective damage die of d0 (see Unarmed Combat in **Chapter Five: Rules**) and

all damage is considered Stun, even that derived from the attack roll itself. If the defender has any armor or protection, his **Armor Rating** is subtracted from the damage.

Advancement (19)

One of the most common features of any role playing game is character advancement. This is appealing on a number of levels, not the least of which is the thrill of seeing your untested recruit grow into a seasoned veteran. Improving your character is fun, and we use **Advancement Points** to accomplish it.

Earning Advancement Points

Advancement Points are awarded at the end of each session for playing your character well, contributing to the enjoyment of others, and providing some meaningful development to the story. If your character spends the bulk of a session sitting in the background and doing nothing, his advancement won't be rapid—unless he's got Traits that support such aloof or noncommittal behavior.

Spending Advancement Points

Once you've got enough Advancement Points, you can spend them on advancing your Attributes, Skills, and Traits. You can even buy new Skills and Assets, or reduce or eliminate Complications. For the most part, you need to provide some good reason for major changes to your character, however. Suddenly becoming Mechanically Inclined when your character's never picked up a wrench in his life doesn't make sense. On the other hand, if during the course of the game your character spends time fixing up the team's SUV and spends time online studying car repair manuals, you could justify it.

Refer to **Chapter Two: Characters** for details on spending Advancement points.

That's It

You can gain a more thorough understanding of the rules by reading through **Chapter Five**, and if you're going to be the Game Master you'll need to make sure you are comfortable enough to handle skill resolution and combat without having to flip pages every five seconds. But if you're coming in as a player, we want you to focus more on your character and his role in the story than the minutiae of game rules. Have fun!

CHAPTER 2
CHARACTERS

Every story needs characters. They might rely on their physical brawn, their cunning intellect, or their special powers to accomplish their goals. They might be heroes, villains, or just John and Jane Doe caught up in a bad situation. They might be newcomers or old hands. No matter what the focus of your game, and no matter what type of character you want to create, this chapter will guide you through the process of putting your imagination into play.

A player usually creates and controls a single player character. The player directs his character's actions, like a movie director telling an actor what to say, do, and feel. Some players might choose to make characters based on aspects of themselves, their own personalities, or characters they enjoy reading about or watching on TV. Other players might decide they would rather portray someone unlike themselves: an alien creature, a villainous sorcerer, or even just someone of the opposite gender. And if you're having trouble picking a character to create, just give this chapter a read-through and then browse **Chapter Three: Traits and Skills** to see if they give you any inspiration!

Creating Characters

Character creation is a relatively simple process. Prior to creating characters, however, your group will need to make some choices.

The Cortex System can be used for any game setting, from sci-fi to high fantasy. Some games might even shift between multiple worlds or settings. Because of this flexibility, the rules, Traits, Skills, and items here in the book most likely won't all be available in every game. A game set in the modern world might leave out all the mystical abilities, and a dungeon-delving team of medieval adventurers won't have access to high-tech gadgets.

Your Game Master provides the basics of the game world and guides the story, so talk with him about your character options. It isn't the Game Master's job to stifle your creativity, but in order to make the game fun for everyone he might need to give you some direction for it. Once everybody settles on the backdrop for the game, the Game Master needs to make an important decision: the starting level for the player characters.

Optional Rule: Variable Starting Points

Some players might want to start with a heavier concentration of Attributes, or more Skills, than the starting levels give them in points. The number of Attribute, Skill, and Trait Points listed in the starting levels exist to give guidelines to help new players and to make sure the characters have a variety of abilities.

Because character creation works just like character advancement, the Game Master can simply give starting characters 0 Points in each of the categories, and instead grant them an equivalent number of Advancement Points. Because each Attribute Point costs 8 Advancement Points, each Skill Point costs 3 Advancement Points, and each Trait Point costs 7 Advancement Points, characters that use this option will start with:

Novice: 522 Advancement Points
Veteran: 616 Advancement Points
Elite: 710 Advancement Points

The players can then spend points to buy Attribute, Skill, and Trait Points, just like character advancement.

There is one difference between this and normal character advancement: During this method of character creation, taking Complications will still grant the player more Trait Points to spend. Players still have the same limits on Complications as they do during normal creation, so they cannot gain more than 30 Trait Points (210 Advancement Points) from Complications this way, but after character creation they won't be able to choose Complications in exchange for points at all.

If, after he has bought as many Attribute, Skill, and Trait Points as he can, the player still has leftover Advancement Points, they are recorded on his character sheet, and can be spent to advance the characters later.

This optional rule makes character creation take longer, and is more complicated for players new to the Cortex System or role playing games in general, but it does give the players more freedom in how they put their characters together. The Game Master should consider carefully before allowing variable starting points in his game.

Create as a Group

So, once you have your starting level and you know the basics behind the world you'll be playing in, you could—in theory—go off and dream up whatever character suits your fancy. However, remember that a lot of the fun of the game comes from your interaction with the other players in your group!

While it isn't absolutely necessary, for many games it makes sense to create characters as a group. Grab some snacks, meet up for game time, and spend a session talking about what your plans are. This can help ensure that there's enough diversity on your team, that characters don't conflict too strongly, and can even help the players come up with an idea of how their characters know each other and what their relationships are like. It also means the Game Master will be there to answer questions and give appropriate advice, and more experienced players might be able to help out newcomers.

Starting Level

Your character can range in personal experience from a complete neophyte to the most elite commander of an interstellar navy. How powerful your character is when the game begins is called his starting level. Starting level is usually selected by your Game Master, and should probably be the same for all characters. Once your Game Master has selected a starting level, you can refer to the descriptions below to see how many points you receive to distribute later in character creation, and to get a general idea of how powerful your character will be.

Novice: This is the default starting level. Characters will be competent within their own fields, but are unlikely to have mastered anything yet. They could be college students, young adventurers just setting out for the first time, or a group of pilots just out of the academy.

A Novice starts with **42 Attribute Points**, **62 Skill Points**, and **0 Trait Points**.

Veteran: Characters at this level have a bit more experience under their belts. They may well have mastered their chosen fields, or might be equipped with a diverse array of abilities. They might be battle-hardened soldiers, trained experts, or skilled magi.

A Veteran starts with **48 Attribute Points**, **68 Skill Points**, and **4 Trait Points**.

Elite: These characters are old hands at whatever it is they do. They are likely to be among the best of the best in their fields of concentration, and may be prepared for almost anything. The much-respected commander of a fleet, the CEO of a shadowy mega-corporation, or the world's most notorious thief would likely be built along these lines.

An Elite starts with **54 Attribute Points**, **74 Skill Points**, and **8 Trait Points**.

Concept

Now that you've got a starting level, you need a concept. The starting level gives you the beginning of the game's mechanics and numbers that will describe your character, but the concept guides the way to exactly how you want to use those mechanics.

The Game Master may have a general idea for the group, such as everyone playing vampires or aliens in hiding. Your concept is your personal twist on that general idea. Are you an ancient, powerful vampire? Or a half-vampire who wants to be human again? Does your alien look human, or use disguises to cover up his strangely ridged forehead and ears? If the Game Master has a more "open" idea for his campaign, you have even more options.

The concept doesn't have to be really detailed. Just try to nail down a basic idea, something you can describe in one or two sentences. It can change later if you get a better concept, but it'll help if you have something to work with when you move on from this point.

Origin

Most Cortex characters are assumed to be human, or at least human-like, so you might not have to worry about too much here. Just make sure that your city, nation, or planet of origin suits the game.

However, if you have a very unusual origin, talk it over with the Game Master. Humans aren't necessarily the only option—but this is a game about people, so they're the baseline. If you want to play a dog-shaped robot with superhuman intelligence, or a time-and-space-traveling alien tourist, maybe the Game Master will allow it, but you have to build the character just like any other: by taking the appropriate Attributes, Traits, and Skills, with no particular advantage in terms of the points you get to spend.

For a non-human, your best bet is to choose Traits very carefully. Think about what bonuses and penalties you should have, and clear them with the Game Master. However, non-human characters are much, much more rare than those who are just partly supernatural, or are a kind of supernatural being that operates in a largely human way. It'll be easier to make a character who looks human but happens to live forever, or one who picked up a bit of eldritch lore, than it will to create a being with no human needs or limitations; those characters are best reserved for supporting characters controlled by the Game Master.

Attributes

Attributes are the game terms that describe the basic physical and mental makeup of the character. They are used in almost every action in the game, and represent fairly broad categories of natural ability. The physical Attributes are: **Agility**, **Strength,** and **Vitality**. The mental Attributes are: **Alertness**, **Intelligence,** and **Willpower**.

Each Attribute is given a rating of a die type, and the larger the die, the better the Attribute. Humans average out at around d6 in every Attribute. Someone with an Intelligence of d4 might have had trouble in school; someone with a d10 Intelligence could have graduated with honors.

Normally, there are limits to how high a single Attribute can be when the character is created (see table 2.1), but it is possible for experienced characters to grow beyond those limitations. Once the game begins, Attributes can be raised indefinitely. Also, Attributes cannot start at a level below d4. It might sound harsh, but people that inept probably wouldn't last.

Table 2.1: Attribute Die Costs

Die Type	Attribute Point Cost
d4	4
d6	6
d8	8
d10	10
d12	12
d12 + d2	14
d12 + d4	16

Character Race

Some games will require characters that are decidedly not human, be they player characters or supporting characters. When building a nonhuman, keep in mind that the "defaults" of the Cortex System are geared to represent humans. Most humans have d6 in every Attribute, and very few Traits.

In some cases, it might just be a matter of scale; if the entire party is going to need higher Attributes to keep up with their "new" species, then the Game Master could assign everyone extra starting Attribute Points for their level. However, many nonhumans will likely have strange abilities not covered by Attributes; that's part of the appeal of playing them!

In cases like these, however, the player still needs to spend points to get those abilities, most often in the form of more Traits. To make this a little easier for the player, the Cortex System uses Trait packages called Bundles to organize collections of Traits linked together to represent something like a nonhuman species. These Bundles don't make the Traits any less expensive, but they do make them easier to visualize all at once. See the Bundles section in **Chapter Three: Traits and Skills** for more details.

When creating a character, you start out with a number of Attribute Points determined by your starting level, chosen by the Game Master. To keep things simple, buying an Attribute die costs Attribute Points equal to the die type you want to purchase.

For example, most characters will likely be starting off at the level of Novice—better than the average person on the street, but with plenty of room to grow, and a lot left to learn. That gives you 42 Attribute Points to spend, so you won't be able to make all your Attributes exceptionally high; you'll have to pick and choose. If you're dead set on playing the brains of the operation, you might want to go ahead and set aside 10 points to buy an Intelligence of d10 right away, before starting on the rest. And keep in mind the limitations of the game system: You can't buy a type of die that doesn't exist, so no d5s or d7s!

As a Novice, you can't start with any Attributes higher than d12. However, to reflect their greater experience, Veterans can start with Attributes that run as high as d12 + d2, and Elites can go as high as d12 + d4. Don't worry, though. Regardless of what your Attributes look like when you start, they can all improve later. Unfortunately, they could also be (temporarily or permanently) reduced through accident, even below a d4!

Physical Attributes

Take a moment to review your character concept and think about how he operates. If he's better with his body than his brain, then physical Attributes are what he'll need most.

Agility covers quickness and physical coordination, both in terms of balance and hand-eye work. A high Agility lets you shoot first and ask questions later. A low score means you might not be able to get that gun out of your holster in time to worry about shooting.

Strength represents the physical brawn of your character, how much muscle he has and how well toned it is. A high Strength lets you kick down doors, throw a solid punch, or bench press more than the other guy. A low Strength might give you trouble with the kickback of even a small pistol and make it difficult to carry luggage.

Vitality measures general toughness and health. A character with high Vitality will be hard to take down, and even harder to keep down. He can drink all night, work all day, and take hits that would put down a lesser person. If you've got low Vitality, though, you need to watch yourself near sick people, and probably avoid highly dangerous work.

Mental Attributes

If you want to be quick-witted and sharp, you'll want good mental Attributes instead of physical. Keeping your mind on the job and actually being useful would be difficult if you didn't put any points here.

Alertness represents your ability to observe, understand, and intuit what is going on around you. A high Alertness score lets you hear someone sneaking up on you, detect the lie in the answer to your question, or notice that someone might not be exactly what they seem. A low score could mean that you don't see the sniper in time, fail to detect the oncoming spatial vortex, or slip on a patch of ice while out jogging.

Intelligence gives a measure of simple brainpower—your ability to think, reason, and remember. A high Intelligence makes you bright, inventive, and capable of dealing with complex information. A character with a low Intelligence score might need to consult a dictionary on a regular basis, and might have trouble with dangerous machinery.

Willpower represents your determination, how forceful your personality and will are. If you have a high score in Willpower you can more easily resist intimidation, torture, and hardship, convince someone to do what you want through sheer charisma, and push yourself farther than most would expect. A low Willpower would make it easier to take advantage of you, push you around, and even kill you.

Derived Attributes

You already have made most of the choices about your character by assigning their six main Attributes. Derived Attributes are created directly from those choices, and don't actually require you to make any more decisions. Essentially, what we have here are four things: your character's Initiative, which determines how quickly they react to danger, and his Life Points, which tell you how much physical punishment they can take. You also have your character's Endurance, which helps him stay alive when mortally wounded, and his Resistance, which helps him to fight off alien mutagens and common colds.

Life Points are a measure of how much damage you can take before falling unconscious or dying. Whenever you get fried by magic, get punched, or fall down the stairs, you accumulate points of Stun (nonlethal or temporary damage) and Wound (lethal or long-term damage). When these equal or exceed your Life Points, you probably go down. You can find your Life Points by adding up the maximum values of your Vitality and Willpower dice, along with any modifiers from Traits. For example, a character with d10 Vitality and d6 Willpower would have 16 Life Points.

Initiative is a roll that decides who goes first, or whether or not you can react in time. You make Initiative rolls at the start of combat or similar time-constrained situations. When the Game Master asks for an Initiative roll, he wants you to roll your Agility + Alertness dice and total the results. Higher is better—you want to go first as often as possible! You might also make Initiative rolls to determine your reaction time. Do you dive behind cover before the grenade goes off? If it's possible, you roll your Initiative against the grenade thrower's attack roll, and hope you win. Record your character's Agility + Alertness dice, along with any modifications from Traits, as his Initiative.

Endurance keeps you from going down when you should—for example, when you rack up all those points of Stun and Wounds. Record your Willpower + Vitality dice for your Endurance, modified by any Traits. Just like Initiative, when you roll, higher is better!

Resistance is similar to Endurance, but while Endurance tracks a measure of how determined you are to live, Resistance is simply your ability to fight off infection and disease. Record your Vitality + Vitality dice, modified by any Traits, for your Resistance.

Traits

The list of Attributes and Derived Attributes gives you a rough idea about your character, but they don't really give him any more sense of personality than a diploma does about the person holding it. You may find some basis for comparison, get some idea as to who is qualified for what job, but that's nothing more than numbers. A real character needs more than that.

Interpret the Numbers

Your character's got a Strength of d6 and an Intelligence of d10. Unfortunately, telling your character's boss meaningless numbers won't get him assigned a cushy job; the boss doesn't want to hear about dice, he wants to hear what those dice mean!

A d6 in something is more or less average. For your Attributes, that means that you can expect most people to have a d6 in almost everything—player characters and major supporting characters are exceptions to that, but most other people are pretty easy to peg. Having a d6 doesn't make you bad at something, but it doesn't give you much of an edge either. For Attributes, since you aren't likely to have anything below a d4, that d4 represents something a fair bit below average. A d4 Intelligence doesn't stop you from talking properly, but it might make it difficult to follow a complex argument or give a coherent mission report. A d4 Strength doesn't mean you can't lift yourself out of bed, but it might make you a 90-pound weakling. On the other end of the spectrum, d12 represents the maximum that most people could achieve—not the extreme end of human possibility, but the most common end of it, and a d12 is damn good. We're a versatile lot, especially when you take into account the type of people who become the heroes and villains of stories.

When it comes to Skills, the "d6 average" represents what the common worker who uses that Skill might have. However, that does assume they should have one or two Specialties in the areas they personally excel in—a soldier might have Guns d6/Pistol d8/Rifle d10, for example, and a medic (even a poorly trained one) probably has at least Medicine d6/First Aid d8. The d6 is the base competency for a professional; expert-level or professional-level ability means having a few Specialties above that as well.

In terms of Traits, these numbers become a little more abstract. There isn't really a "professional" or "average" level for Traits as a whole, especially for player characters. As the stars of the show, they tend to have more resources (Assets) and problems (Complications) than most people! However, it's a safe bet to assume that almost every character, no matter how minor, has at least one Asset and one Complication. For supporting characters, most will have about d6 worth of Assets and d6 worth of Complications.

Keep these things in mind when you make your character—don't be afraid to have a d4 in something, and don't be afraid to push your limits, drive yourself above and beyond what others expect of you.

Some people stand out because of their leadership capabilities. Some stand out because they're not quite right in the head. In games using the Cortex System, these qualities are called Traits. Traits help define some of the more important aspects of your character's personality, history, background, friends, enemies, and secrets. They aren't a replacement for a character concept or description, but they do help bring some of those more nebulous personal qualities into play. They also let otherwise human characters tap into some aspects of the supernatural or high-tech. Be careful to review what Traits you choose with your Game Master, because he might feel some of them don't match the world he is trying to portray.

Traits come in two types: **Assets**, which are primarily positive and which grant you some assistance or an edge; and **Complications**, which make life a little harder most of the time. Both can help define your character, give you some guidance on how to role play them, and make game play more fun! Like Attributes, Traits can be bought in a variety of die types, but many of them have a more limited range. Some Traits can be purchased in die types of "d2+," making them available at any level. These would be purchased just like your Attributes, but using Trait Points instead of Attribute Points. However, other Traits can only be purchased within a smaller range, like "d6–d12," (which could be bought at the levels d6, d8, d10, or d12) or only at certain specific levels, such as "d2/d6/d10." These differences are explained again in **Chapter Three: Traits and Skills**, where you can see all the available Traits defined and explained.

You may not start with any Trait Points, since Novices start with 0 by default. That's where Complications come in. While Complications also provide you with a key method for earning Plot Points later (see **Chapter Five: Rules** for more details), during character creation they also provide you with more Trait Points. A Complication provides you with Trait Points equal to the die type it is listed as, so a Complication rated at d8 gives you 8 points to spend on Assets.

However, be sure to keep in mind that Complications aren't just a way to get more Assets; they'll impact heavily on the character during game play, and can get him killed if they aren't careful! Choose your Traits wisely, keeping your character concept in mind and using the Traits to flesh it out and inspire more of it.

All characters must start with at least one Asset and one Complication, and cannot start with any Trait rated higher than d12. You cannot gain more than 30 Trait Points from Complications.

Skills

You've got your character's Attributes and Traits so you probably have a pretty good idea of what he's capable of doing. His know-how and experience could be from a classroom, time in the field, apprenticeship in an industry, or sheer natural talent—but whatever the source, it all gets used the same way. Knowledge and practice are given their form in Skills.

Someone with high Attributes usually has an advantage in a given situation, but that doesn't mean he always wins. Natural ability is great—and is often crucial—but even someone with high Attributes doesn't stand a chance against an average Joe with a much higher level of training. Pay attention to what Skills are available and think about what your character would have picked up over the years of training or experience.

Like Attributes and Traits, Skills are rated as die types, starting with a d2 and progressing upward. Like Attributes, Skills theoretically have no upper limit—but there is one hitch in the progression. Skills are divided into two types: **General Skills** and **Specialty Skills**.

General Skills represent broad bases of knowledge. They cover many individual activities, and let characters be competent at a field without being particularly gifted at any one thing. However, because they are so broad

Table 2.2: Skill Costs

Die Type	General Cost	Specialty Cost
d2	2	–
d4	4	–
d6	6	–
d8	–	2
d10	–	4
d12	–	6
d12 + d2	–	8
d12 + d4	–	10

in scope, they are also limited in depth: General Skills cannot advance beyond d6. Your character can purchase General Skills normally from d2–d6, but if he wants to progress beyond that boundary, he has to pick individual Specialties. Guns, Athletics, and Drive are good examples of General Skills.

Specialty Skills are much more narrow and focused. Guns is a General Skill, and lets your character pick up, fire, and handle any small arms. However, the Pistol Specialty only covers pistols, not shotguns, rifles, or submachine guns. The benefit of Specialties is that, in game terms, they pick up where General Skills leave off—they start at d8 and progress upward from there, letting your character keep improving.

Each Specialty you purchase has to be assigned to an appropriate General Skill, and you cannot purchase Specialties under a General Skill until it has reached the d6 level. For example, your character cannot have the General Skill Athletics d4 and purchase the Specialty Skill Running d8; he would first have to advance his Athletics to d6, at which point he could then buy any Specialties under Athletics. There is no limit to the number of Specialties you can have under a given General Skill. Also, Specialties have no upper limit, save that characters cannot start with any above d12. So, to continue that example, your character could eventually learn enough about Athletics to achieve the Skills Athletics d6/Running d12 + d4 /Climbing d10 /Dodge d10, given time and determination.

To buy Skills, spend your character's starting Skill Points like you did his Attribute and Trait Points. Just remember: You only need to pay for the General Skill once, but the Specialties under it each need to be bought individually. For example, a street thug's d6 in Melee Weapons costs 6 Skill Points, but the Specialty of d10 in Clubs only costs an additional 4 Skill Points, since he's already paid for the first d6. Adding in other Specialties would work the same way: A d8 in Knife would cost 2 more Skill Points, and a d12 in Chains would cost 6. General Skill of d6 (6 Points) + Specialty d10 (4 Points) + Specialty d8 (2 Points) + Specialty d12 (6 Points) = 18 Skill Points total. Things would be much different if he had to pay full price for Specialties!

When you create your character and buy his Skills, keep the game setting in mind. Just as some Traits are inappropriate for a specific setting, some Skills are poorly suited for that setting. A medieval fantasy world won't have much use for Skills involving computers, and a realistic hard-as-nails modern game probably won't involve mystical or supernatural Skills.

Novices cannot start with any Skills higher than d12, but because of their experience Veterans can start with Skills as high as d12 + d2, and Elites can start with Skills at the d12 + d4 level.

Customization

Even though you can already divide out some Skills from the general list that might not fit your game world, you might want to go even further. The Specialties listed with each General Skill aren't locked down. If your world needs new or different Specialties under each Skill, just change things as it becomes necessary! The only restriction is that a character can't have the same Specialty listed under more than one General Skill, and that they should always take a Specialty where it best fits them (so a doctor would have First Aid as a Specialty of Medicine, while a woodsman would have First Aid as a Specialty of Survival).

Skill Rolls

You won't be using your Skills by themselves. Skills complement your natural abilities. When you roll a Skill die, you'll also roll an Attribute die (and sometimes a Trait die), total the results, and hope to beat the Difficulty number. However, no single Attribute is married to a given Skill; which combination you roll depends upon the situation. The Game Master might ask a doctor to roll Alertness + Medicine to diagnose a patient, and then Intelligence + Medicine to treat him properly. If the doctor gets involved in tricky surgery, his player might start rolling Agility + Medicine. The details are all in **Chapter Three: Traits and Skills**.

Unskilled Rolls

No matter how hard you try to plan and prepare, you won't always have all the Skills you need to get a job done—or even survive. In situations where this happens to your character, you should hope that his Attributes alone are enough, because that's what you'll be rolling.

Of course, sometimes you might not be allowed to roll at all. Anyone can fire a gun, but try to perform surgery without training and someone's going to die. Some Skills require training to use, and are marked as such in their descriptions. When it comes to these, you can't even attempt it without at least a d2 in that Skill. Common sense should be enough to see that anyone could attempt most of the other Skills—you can be a bad liar, or a terrible driver, and still try it.

Gear

Starting characters in traditional role playing games seem to have only the very basics—the clothes on their back, the tools they need, and a few small personal effects, along with a little cash. They might not even have those tools or personal belongings if the game is starting in a more restrictive setting, like the middle of a battle or

on a prison ship. On the other hand, the player characters might all be wealthy nobles, or enjoy the benefits of a powerful organization or patron. Characters like this have very little need to worry about available cash.

Discuss with the Game Master what he thinks characters should be starting with. When you have a general idea of what is acceptable, look through **Chapter Four: Gear**, make a list, and check it over with the Game Master. He should be sure that each player character (and the group as a whole) starts with the equipment he is entitled to have before the game begins. It's also important to remember that the experience of the characters (Novice, Veteran, or Elite) doesn't necessarily have any bearing on the player character's personal wealth. There are some very talented, experienced, and skilled homeless people. For more details on gear, see **Chapter Four: Gear**.

Plot Points

In Cortex games, Plot Points are the game's primary reward for good role playing, and represent the interaction of the character and player with the story. Each character starts the game with 6 Plot Points; at any one time, they can have up to 12 (any excess are lost), earning them for a variety of things. They can be spent at almost any time during play, and can add bonus dice to rolls, reduce the damage the character suffers from an attack or accident, or even be used to directly alter or add elements to the story. See **Chapter Five: Rules** for more details on how Plot Points work.

Plot Points are a vital element of the game system, and as you play you'll see more and more opportunities to spend and earn them. Ideally, Plot Points should fall like rain. Plot Points are there to make the game more fun for the players, especially at times when the characters aren't having a good time of it, and having an ample supply of them and opportunities to spend them will improve the game for everyone. It's also worth noting that Plot Points, especially when well spent and used by the whole group, can lead to bonuses for character advancement.

Plot Points are saved between sessions; record how many you have left at the end of each session, and start off with that many next time.

Character Development

Even if you're creating your first character as a Novice, that doesn't mean he'll be a Novice forever. As the game goes on, you'll have the opportunity to learn new Skills, discover or acquire new Traits, and improve your Attributes. Hopefully you'll also be learning more about "yourself" as your character as you go along; this is a role playing game, after all, and getting into your role is what makes things interesting.

Advancement in the Cortex System usually occurs fairly slowly, but it happens steadily over time. By attending game sessions, role playing well, and achieving goals in the game, you will earn Advancement Points that you can spend to buy more Attribute, Trait, and Skill Points. Spending these points is essentially the same as character creation, but now you only need to add to or increase your die ratings, rather than start from scratch.

Between sessions you can increase one of your dice (a single Attribute, Trait, or Skill) by one step. The Game Master may decide that, if there's a long downtime between sessions (or during a session, even) you can buy more than one increase, but there usually isn't time for that except during extensive training. So, for example, if you have an Agility of d6, you could increase it to d8—but not immediately to d10, nor could you simultaneously increase your Guns Skill from d4 to d6. Choose one, and do the other next time.

For Attributes and Skills, you pay the difference in points between your current step and the step you're buying. During character creation, buying an Agility of d8 would cost 8 Attribute Points. When advancing the character, if you have an Agility of d6 (6 Attribute Points during character generation), it would cost 2 Attribute Points to increase it to a d8. The total cost is the same, either way, and so any increase of +1 step should always cost 2 of the appropriate type of points.

For Assets, you may buy them at any level the Game Master agrees is appropriate, even if that means skipping a step or two (or three). Some Traits are only available at high die types, so this is absolutely necessary when buying those. Also, even for Traits that scale like Attributes, you and the Game Master should decide whether or not it makes the most sense to gain it at the high level right away, or to start out at a lower die type. Here, the game and the situation should help decide. Then, simply pay the appropriate cost in Trait Points.

Advanced Rule: Exceeding d12

Dice above d12 cost double the difference—to go from d10 to d12 always costs 2 Points, but to go from d12 to d12 + d2 costs 4 Points. This covers the extraordinary level of ability that dice higher than d12 represent. If the Game Master feels this is too complicated, he can dispense with this rule.

Dealing with Assets & Complications

Complications can be gained during play (sometimes voluntarily), but they *do not* give you Trait Points. Once your character is created, new Complications don't

provide automatic bonuses like that. However, they *do* provide you with more opportunities to earn Plot Points, and otherwise work just like Complications chosen during character creation.

A Complication can be taken off your character sheet by spending its die type maximum in Trait Points, just as much as it would cost to purchase an Asset of the same step. For example, a Complication rated d6 would cost 6 Trait Points to remove.

When gaining or losing any Traits (or even increasing your Attributes and Skills), you should try to role play the change, thinking carefully about how and why the change happened. Sometimes the Game Master might require you to play out the increase in the game; perhaps you can't increase your Knowledge Skills without finding a teacher or an information resource during play. Maybe you can't buy an Asset without first arranging for it through your play, or you can't get rid of a Complication without first dealing with it. Of course, the game is about having fun; Game Masters should be open to the idea of letting players buy the changes they want, and *then* working them into the game as soon as possible. However, the Game Master's word is final.

Advancement Points

You can spend Attribute, Trait, and Skill Points to buy dice. And you can spend Advancement Points to buy those other points with. But how do you do that? And where the do the Advancement Points come from?

Gaining Advancement Points

Advancement Points are awarded to players at the end of each game session. Each character in the group earns the same number after a session, and the amount gained can vary from 1 to 4 Advancement Points (or more, in special cases). This keeps advancement to a reasonable rate, and also both keeps things "fair" and encourages teamwork and group role playing, since the Advancement Points gained are dependent upon all the players.

The Game Master awards Advancement Points for the following things:

Evolution (1 Advancement Point): This is the basic award for playing the game. Nothing stays the same forever, and so characters always earn at least 1 Advancement Point.

Role Playing (+1–2 Advancement Points): If, by and large, the role playing, attitudes, and interactions of the players (and Game Master) let everyone have fun, and included at least some appropriate in-character ideas and role playing from everyone, add 1 Advancement Point to the session award. If the role playing was exceptionally good, the Game Master might consider adding a second bonus Advancement Point.

Plot Interaction (+1 Advancement Point): Plot Points represent the major way that players can interact with the world of the game and influence the story, whether they are spending them to change the story or are earning them (possibly from being changed by the story through their Complications). If every player interacted with the game on this level, by either spending Plot Points to influence the story or by being involved enough to have earned several Plot Points, add 1 Advancement Point to the session award.

The Story (+1 Advancement Point): If the players managed to move the story along, either by following the action or finding their own, add 1 Advancement Point to the session award. They don't necessarily have to have been successful or done the "right thing" to earn this bonus.

The End (+3–6 Advancement Points): If the players brought a storyline, plot, or important chapter of the game to a close (but will be continuing with the same characters), the Game Master might award a bonus that is much larger than normal—especially if there is significant character downtime between sections of the story.

Spending Advancement Points

Spending your Advancement Points is easy. Between sessions, or in periods of character "downtime" as approved by the Game Master, Advancement Points can be spent to increase Attribute, Trait, and Skill steps. Improving an Attribute by one step costs 16 points, changing a Trait die by one step costs 14 points, and raising a skill by one step costs six points. In most campaigns, these costs are doubled to improve above d12. Unspent points are saved, and should be noted on your character sheet. They can be spent normally regardless of when they were earned. The Game Master may ask for story-based justification for your improvements, it should be noted. If your character has been spending all of his spare time at the bowling alley it makes little sense for your Gun skill to increase!

Table 2.3: Advancement Costs

Advancement	AP Cost
+1 Attribute Step	16
+1 Trait Step	14
+1 Skill Step	6

CHAPTER 3
TRAITS AND SKILLS

While Attributes represent a character's basic capabilities, they don't offer a very personal feel for what the character is like, or how he is different from someone with similar numbers on the character sheet. Traits help to define a character, and include everything from aspects of a strong personality or natural talents to a hidden past or psychological torment. Suddenly things are beginning to shape up, and the character becomes a lot more interesting.

Traits

Traits help you define a character by putting names and dice to qualities that don't fit as Attributes or Skills. They might alter the physical makeup of your character, or they could give you a basis for his persona. Beneficial Traits, called Assets, help the character in a variety of ways. On the other hand, negative Traits called Complications make life a little more difficult. Since every character must have at least one Complication and one Asset (no one is ever without at least a few quirks), these tend to balance out for the most part—though that's not a guarantee.

You can't have Traits that directly contradict each other; for example, you can't have both Allure and Ugly, though some Traits can seem opposite without being contradictory. Your Game Master may decide that specific Traits are not allowed, either to certain characters or in general. They might be considered inappropriate for the particular game the characters are participating in, or the Game Master might just consider them too powerful or too damaging. Of course, the Game Master could also be more liberal with Traits, allowing players to start with a higher number or adding Traits not normally available.

Looking back to **Chapter Two: Characters**, you'll see that when creating a character you purchase Assets with points you receive for taking Complications. For this reason, the number of points spent on each will balance out for the most part, so you do not need to take an equal number of Assets and Complications. You could take four lower-value Complications and use the points you get to start with a single high-value Asset. However, no character may gain more than 30 Trait Points from Complications during character creation. Theoretically, you might be able to start with more than 30 points of Assets (since higher starting levels include additional Trait Points), but your Game Master should encourage careful choices about which Traits you pick to represent your character, rather than to pile on as many Assets as possible.

What Traits a character has (or should have) is something that shouldn't be hard to work out. Looking at the character's background or personality (or species!) can be helpful when making these decisions. A smart, smooth operator will be much more likely to have Allure than a calm, quiet computer programmer. However, there's nothing to say that that programmer couldn't take Allure as well. If you want to branch out from the obvious choices, then just try to keep the character in mind. They might be out of sync with expectations, but they should be internally consistent. If your computer programmer is more attractive than most, he still might need to be a mathematical genius to keep his job!

Traits are meant to help solidify your image of who your character is and what they're like. If you choose them randomly or without consideration, you might well end up with a character that seems as little like a real person as the paper they're recorded on.

Assets

Assets are positive Traits, giving your character some advantage or bonus. You start play with at least one, and after that you might acquire more through good role playing and character advancement (see **Chapter Two: Characters** for more details).

Assets are rated with a die type in the same way that Attributes are, but not all Assets are used in the same manner. Many are straightforward, and the die they grant is rolled as a bonus on actions the Asset might benefit. For some, die type is only a way to price the Asset as compared to others. The die is not rolled, but the Trait has other beneficial effects, possibly modifying the way you can spend Plot Points, or granting you additional abilities, or letting you retry failed rolls. Some Assets have a combination of these types of benefits. Also, when choosing Assets, be sure to note what die types each may have. While some Assets may be purchased at any level from d2 upward, like Attributes, some Assets are only available at certain die types. These will be noted with each Asset's description. For example, an Asset available at any level will be noted as d2+; an Asset available in a range like d2 to d6 will be noted as d2–d6; and an Asset only available as levels d2, d6, or d12 will be noted as d2/d6/d12.

Sometimes more than one Asset supplies a benefit to a die roll. The Game Master should be careful to consider which Assets should be allowed to affect the same roll.

The ability to accumulate bonuses and gain extra Trait die on a roll isn't meant to let players use all their Assets all the time. The Game Master has final say as to what Assets can be used on any given roll, and whether or not two specific Assets can be used simultaneously.

While Assets are an integral part of the character, they, like Attributes, can be temporarily damaged or lowered. A character with the Wealthy Asset probably won't have access to most of his funds or resources while on the run from the authorities. However, the Game Master should give the player at least a chance to retrieve whatever it is he's lost in situations like these, before making it a permanent change to the character. In the above example, perhaps the character could persuade a fellow Wealthy friend to float him a loan. Remember, the player has spent points on these Traits, which indicates an investment in that area of his character.

Complications

Complications define your character in another way—usually by giving him a weakness, character flaw, or some other kind of drawback. Basically, any Trait that can make a character's life more complicated is a Complication! For example, being something of an Idealist is often considered a good thing by most folks, yet in the game it means your character is more likely to be swindled by a smooth-talking character run by the Game Master. No one is perfect, and characters that take the spotlight in stories and games can be more plagued than most. These Traits can create trouble for your character and their allies, but then, why would you want Complications at all?

Complications give you points to buy Assets with during character generation. More importantly, they provide great role playing hooks, make your character more believable, and create a great opportunity to earn Plot Points. Complications might push your character to act a certain way (characters who are Overconfident might bite off more than they can chew, even though the player knows it's a bad idea!), and this can enhance the game and the story even though it makes things harder for the good guys. When this happens, the Game Master should award Plot Points for suffering from the Complication.

You should remember that it is your job to role play the specific faults you choose. When it spurs particularly good role playing or is fun for the group, even minor instances of problems caused by Complications might be worth a Plot Point (the Amorous character drops bad pick-up lines all the time, and sometimes gets himself slapped or worse). More Plot Points should be forthcoming for actually creating trouble when things were otherwise going well (instead of keeping an eye on the radar sweeps like he's supposed to, your character is chatting up the lady at the next station, and doesn't notice enemy contacts right away).

Your Game Master may add Complications to characters during the game, based on events in the story—for example, decisions you make might annoy someone important, earning you a Rival, or you might be hit with an extraordinary success and lose a leg, gaining Impaired Movement. These Complications do *not* come with points for more Assets as they do during character creation, but you can absolutely earn Plot Points for them.

Mechanically, Complications work in the same ways Assets do. You can purchase them as die types, some with a range and some with only a few levels available. They can be added to rolls as dice, or they can alter a number of other things, and multiple Complications can affect the same action. However, the difference here is that Complications will either penalize the character directly, or add their bonus die to the *opposing* Difficulty (which would be rolled either by the Game Master or the opposing player character).

Complications can be bought off during play, but, as with buying Assets, this requires appropriate role playing, as well as the Game Master's permission—not all Complications can easily be eliminated! For more information on that, see **Chapter Two: Characters**.

Trait Levels & Scaling

When a Trait is added directly to a die roll, it's fairly easy to see how powerful it is. Some Traits affect a character's performance in different ways, and the Trait die simply is there to indicate how significant (and expensive to purchase) it is for the character. Examples might be those that offer enhanced or different ways to spend plot points, those that give your character a special ability that isn't covered by a die roll, or role playing Complications that offer your character the chance to earn more Plot Points. More on that in a moment.

Many Traits—especially Complications—are purely indicators of habits or behaviors that your character might indulge in, or ways in which other characters will respond to your character. Greed, lust, and cowardice are all things that can hinder your character in the strictest sense while providing excellent material for role playing. Portraying your character's flaws in such a way not only makes for a more memorable story, but it also provides an excellent way to earn more Plot Points. Understand that a Trait will never force a decision on your character, however, they are there to provide guidance. A Coward can still be brave, an Amorous character can choose to behave, and so on.

However, you might want to create a character that is more defined by these Complications than most—a character so Greedy that he'd sell out his own

grandmother for personal gain, or so bent on glory that he'll do anything, even if it gets him killed or sacrifices his friends. A concept like this should be discussed with your Game Master. If the Game Master feels it is appropriate to the game and the character, you can scale up the Complication. You will have to be careful to remember that the Complication now defines your character more completely than the normal version. If you don't portray that level of role playing or that much adherence to your character's concept, then you'll lose the benefits you gained from the extra points.

This principle can also be applied to Assets, but Game Masters should be even more careful in handling those requests—some Traits are limited in scope in order to prevent abuse! If you merely want your character to be the most powerful or the best, your Game Master should disallow any changes that simply further that goal. When you want to portray something interesting, fun, and reasonable—that's what the Game Master should be facilitating! In these cases, Assets can also be scaled up.

Unusual Traits ✖

Most of the Traits in this chapter reflect somewhat believable characteristics—things you might expect to observe in the real world. Others, however, reflect ideas that step a bit outside of mundane reality and into the realm of fantasy, science fiction, horror, or any genre in between. These unusual Traits are accompanied by a special symbol (✖) to designate them.

Even campaigns grounded in reality may still have room for some of these unusual Traits. Players might make a convincing argument to include one or more when creating characters. Game Masters should consider these ideas carefully based on the needs of the story before returning to the player with a rejection.

Trait Descriptions

Assets

Air of Mystery (d6) ✖

For whatever reason, you project an aura that's mysterious and possibly a bit dangerous, and allows you to perform minor feats that take normal folk by surprise. Examples include: the ability to suddenly step out of sight when someone looks away for an instant, causing candles or lights to flicker, the power to conveniently appear in a doorway where you weren't seconds earlier, or make the hair on the backs of peoples' necks stand up. If you invoke this for purely cosmetic effect, there is no cost or roll required. If you wish to use it to your advantage, the Game Master may allow you to spend a Plot Point to add your Trait die to a roll to intimidate or impress someone, make a stealthy or sudden escape, sneak up behind someone for a surprise attack, etc. This Trait cannot be used in this way more than once every scene or situation, and you can't use it in the same turn that you make an attack.

Allure (d2+)

You are especially attractive. Add your Allure die to any Influence or appearance-based rolls against someone who might find your gender, position, or nature appealing—though you have to be seen or sensed directly to gain this bonus. Phone calls don't count.

d6+: If you have this Trait at d6 or higher, any Plot Points you use on rolls that include this Trait count for more. Increase the bonus die you get from spending Plot Points by a +2 step. This only works on Plot Points spent before the roll, not those you spend after.

d12+: If your Allure Trait die is d12 or higher, you may even add your Trait die to rolls against people or sentient beings who would not normally be attracted to you, as long as the situation otherwise warrants it; however, this unearthly beauty is clearly not normal.

Alternate Identity (d2–d6)

Somewhere, be it another town, country, or planet, you are recognized as somebody else. Perhaps it's the original identity that you abandoned, or it could be that you look almost identical to someone else. Either way you are recognized and treated as this other person whenever you are around people from that place. Now, if that really is not you, close friends and family might be able to tell the difference (requiring you to "fake it" if you pass yourself off as the other person). At d2 level, the person is only known on a small scale or holds only a modest reputation. At higher levels you are recognized as someone of great importance or achievement. This primarily only affects role playing social encounters, however the Game Master might allow you to add your Trait die to certain actions when the alternate identity could be to your benefit.

Ambidextrous (d2)

You possess a high degree of manual dexterity, and can write, type, or perform other fine actions with either hand at no loss of skill. This Trait has no affect on gross motor skills or actions that require physical movement or coordination, such as combat. For the ability to use two weapons at the same time, take the Two-Handed Fighting Asset. This Trait usually comes into play when you are suffering from an impairment or injury in one hand and want to continue to write or carry out fine actions with the other hand at no loss of quality. You may also add your Trait die to actions where being able to do things with each hand simultaneously could produce a beneficial effect, such as making two accurate forged

documents at the same time, or impressing somebody with your manual dexterity. It does not negate the penalty for performing multiple actions.

Animal Empathy (d2+)

Some people just have a way with critters, and you happen to be one. You have an intuition in how animals think, react, communicate, and behave, all of which allows you to deal with them far more easily. You may add your Trait die whenever your action involves understanding or influencing animals. At lower levels this represents simply being good with animals, where at d12 level or higher you can actually talk with them.

d6+: If you have this Trait at d6 or higher, any Plot Points you use on rolls that include this Trait count for more. Increase the bonus die you get from spending Plot Points by a +2 step. This only works on Plot Points spent before the roll, not those you spend after.

Attuned to Nature (d2+)

You have a green thumb. You know your way around plants, animals, and the great outdoors. Add your Trait die to rolls to identify local flora and fauna, track, hunt, forage, grow crops, navigate in the wilderness or at sea, and so on. When you need supplies in a natural environment you might find food and water to supply you for a short time: Roll your Trait die (modified by up to –2 steps in a harsh environment or up to +2 steps in a lush environment). The result is the number of days you can automatically supply one person for.

d6+: If you have this Trait at d6 or higher, any Plot Points you use on rolls that include this Trait count for more. Increase the bonus die you get from spending Plot Points by a +2 step. This only works on Plot Points spent before the roll, not those you spend after.

d12+: If your Attuned to Nature Trait die is d12 or higher, you can't be lost in the wild, you can always find food and water in a natural environment (if it exists), and you can calm even outright hostile animals—you seem more a part of Mother Earth than the human race.

Attuned to Technology (d2+)

You have an easy time with machines and electronics. Technology just comes naturally to you, it seems. Add your Trait die to any rolls to repair, design, analyze, create, or find (in a machine shop or other appropriate place) technological gadgetry. You also have an intuitive understanding of machines and devices; with an Average Alertness + Intelligence + Attuned to Technology roll, you can identify any mundane device and learn to operate basic functions (though not skilled functions, like landing an aircraft). You can also identify any fundamental flaws in the design or repairs that need to be made that are currently preventing operation—however, you must be examining the machine itself to get this roll, not just the plans or designs.

d6+: If you have this Trait at d6 or higher, any Plot Points you use on rolls that include this Trait count for more. Increase the bonus die you get from spending Plot Points by a +2 step. This only works on Plot Points spent before the roll, not those you spend after.

d12+: If your Attuned to Technology Trait die is d12 or higher, you almost always have a myriad of small parts, tools, and resources available to you—or you can jury-rig them from your surroundings—allowing you to build small gadgets in the field. You may also create, repair, alter or sabotage devices much more quickly than usual. Normally, constructing or altering a device is a Complex action which could require anywhere from 10 to 60 minutes per roll. When working on a device smaller than a car, you may reduce the time requirement per roll to one combat turn (three seconds).

Blue Blood (d2–d6)

You are descended from royalty, nobility, or a noted family—depending on just where you're from. Your background might open various doors for you and in some social circles people are more inclined to react favorably to you by name alone. If this is the case, you may add your Trait die to social actions. Note that in rare instances people may react unfavorably to your name and it might actually work against you—though the Game Master should reward you with Plot Points when the family name causes you problems rather than smoothing your way.

Born Behind the Wheel (d2+)

People say you learned to drive, fly, or pilot before you could walk. You can make vehicles perform beyond their usual specs. Pick a single category of vehicles, such as cars and trucks, light spacecraft, airplanes, boats, or ships. Add your Trait die to all rolls to operate these vehicles (see **Chapter Six: Rules**).

d6+: If you have this Trait at d6 or higher, any Plot Points you use on rolls that include this Trait count for more. Increase the bonus die you get from spending Plot Points by a +2 step. This only works on Plot Points spent before the roll, not those you spend after.

d12+: If your Born Behind the Wheel Trait die is d12 or higher, whenever making a roll using this Trait, you can spend a single Plot Point to negate a botch. Also, if you fail a roll that uses this Trait that should be within your normal capabilities (the Difficulty could potentially be beaten by your Attribute + Skill + Trait roll), you may spend a single Plot Point to turn that failure into a bare success, treating your roll's total as if it had met the Difficulty exactly.

Brawler (d2–d6)

You are a trained and experienced hand-to-hand combatant. You could be a monk schooled in the martial arts, a highly trained Navy SEAL, a mixed-martial-arts arena fighter, or a Victorian pugilist. Your unarmed damage is treated as Basic damage, rather than Stun damage, and you may add your Trait die as an additional damage die to any unarmed attack. You may make called shots to vital areas to deliver Wound damage, rather than Basic damage (see Called Shots, page 92.)

Combat Ready (d10)

Some people are just ready for a fight, and have the necessary moves. For every attack action you take in a combat turn, you may subsequently take a single non-attack action without incurring additional multiple action penalties beyond those incurred from the multiple attack actions. The Game Master may still limit attack actions to no more than two or three per turn, as usual.

Constructed (d8)

You don't have a normal physiology—you were built, made, or spawned in such a way that you can be repaired or restored through effort by yourself or another. Unless otherwise restricted, you still heal normally. Appropriate Skills include Tech, Mechanic, or something that otherwise represents what would be needed to make repairs on your constructed body. A successful Skilled action targeting Wound converts all Wound damage to Stun, and a second successful action removes all Stun damage. These are complex actions that use Table 5.6 in Chapter Five: Rules.

Contacts (d2+)

You have allies who will offer you assistance in times of need. Once a game session, you may call on them for help. You can alter a situation to include their assistance just as if you had spent Plot Points to edit the story. The number of Plot Points spent is equal to the maximum die value of your Trait, and you can't spend normal Plot Points on this edit. If the Game Master wishes to reject a use of this Trait, do not consider it used up for that session.

When taking this Trait initially, you and the Game Master must confer and decide upon the nature of your allies, be they equals, subordinates, or patrons. It's possible to have a variety of different connections in all sorts of places, especially for high values of this Asset, but it may fit your concept better to have a pre-defined group of allies; some examples might be "the military" or "the press" or "the underground."

Another possibility is that your character is a member of, or even the leader of, a supporting character gang, group, MegaCorp, or other organization. In this situation, Contacts represents that group, although other Traits may also be taken to represent the group's other aspects. Even if your character is the head of a small military, his platoon of heavily armed soldiers only shows up occasionally—when the Trait calls for them—even though they are always theoretically present. Either the situation contrives to keep your character from using them to simply solve everything for him, or perhaps the game takes place while your character is "on vacation" or on "shore leave," away from his group. Having that army there in the background and well-defined makes it easier to find an excuse to use this Trait, and it could also provide a way for the group to become involved in a war story if one ever comes up.

Danger Sense (d4/d8)

They say you have eyes in the back of your head. You seem to always know when danger is coming, and are very difficult to surprise.

d4: The Game Master secretly makes a Hard Alertness + Perception/Intuition + Danger Sense roll for you when danger threatens, usually a turn or two before it strikes. If you succeed, you get a bad feeling about the situation that provides a warning, giving you the chance to be on guard. Sometimes this happens further ahead of time. For example, if an unknown enemy is preparing to launch a major offensive later in the day, you might wake up feeling uneasy and tense.

d8: As above, but additionally you can't be attacked completely by surprise. You are always alert to danger, if only just a moment before the attack. Even a sniper can't be sure you won't suddenly duck out of the way. You can only be deprived of your Innate Defense if physically restrained or unconscious.

Destiny (d12)

You have a fate in the grander scheme of things. This destiny doesn't mean you'll be happy on your way there, though it does try to keep you from getting yourself killed. Whenever you would be killed otherwise, roll the Trait's die. If the result is 3 or higher, circumstances arrange for your survival—the killing blow is reduced to a nearly fatal wound, the mob is persuaded to spare you, or the like. Unfortunately, your Destiny doesn't protect those around you, keep you healthy, or spare those who might be important to you.

There are limits to your charmed life, though. Your Destiny can only save you once per day, and it can't protect you from situations in which other characters with a Destiny are involved. Also, be sure your Game Master is all right with you taking this Trait.

Devoted to a Cause (d6)

You support a cause, duty, or goal. Whether you're raised to it or programmed for it, you find it just and worthy. If you can reasonably justify your actions as

directly supporting your cause (and it must be directly), you may increase the bonus die you get from spending Plot Points by a +2 step. This only works on Plot Points spent before the roll, not those you spend after.. However, you do not also add this Trait die to these rolls, since it represents fervor—not talent.

Enhanced Communication (d2+)

You possess one or more additional or improved forms of communicating with others. Use this Asset to reflect anything from speaking with animals to telepathic speech. Once the Game Master signs off on the rationalization for your enhancement, select a rating. Some examples might be:

d4: Speak with a type of creature via pheromones/body language/animal speak (werewolf with wolves, etc.).

d6: Telepathic communication with other people on the same "frequency" (your own species, your twin, etc.).

d10: Telepathic communication with any who can understand your language.

d12: Speak with all living things.

This Trait may be taken along with the Impaired Communication Complication, as long as they reflect two different concepts. (For example, a character might be mute but possess the ability to project his thoughts telepathically.) This Trait may be taken more than once to reflect multiple Enhancements.

Enhanced Manipulation (d2+)

Your fine motor control extends beyond just the use of your hands. Use this Asset to reflect the precise manipulators of a bomb-disposal robot or the capabilities of a six-armed demon. Once your Game Master has signed off on this Trait's rationalization, select a rating. Some examples include:

d4: Additional arm with working hand, or prehensile tail (tail can't also be used to climb/move; use Enhanced Movement instead); or perfectly steady, controlled motion, like that of a robotic arm, so you never need to worry about botching bomb disposal or surgery.

d6: Telekinetic field replaces one hand or arm; close range, has the same abilities as a normal limb, save that it can't be physically restrained.

d10: Multitude of appendages that can perform independently, allowing more actions (though with normal Multiple Action penalties).

This Trait may be taken along with the Impaired Manipulation Complication, as long as they reflect two different concepts. (For example, one could have no arms or hands yet might have telekinesis to move objects with his mind.) This Trait may be taken more than once to reflect multiple Enhancements.

Enhanced Movement (d2+)

You possess a capacity for movement beyond that of normal humans. Use this Asset to represent the equine movement of a centaur or the glide of a hover-tank. Once your Game Master has signed off on the rationalization, select a rating. Some examples include:

d2: You can move from tree to tree or swim at your normal land speed.

d6: You can travel long distances at high speeds without tiring, like a well-conditioned horse; or you can climb at your normal land speed; or you can produce your own structure to climb, like a spider.

d8: You can fly or glide short distances; or you have perfect balance, and need never worry about falling when traversing narrow or rickety structures.

d12: You can travel almost endlessly, like a wheeled or treaded vehicle; or you can fly long distances.

This Trait may be taken along with the Impaired Movement Complication, as long as they reflect two different concepts. (For example, a character might walk slowly and awkwardly, yet be able to glide through the air with ease.) This Trait may be taken more than once to reflect multiple Enhancements.

Enhanced Senses (d2+)

Your senses are heightened and possibly superhuman. Use this Asset if your character can see in the dark or sense his environment with echolocation. Once you get Game Master approval for a background, select a rating. Some examples include:

d2: You can see twice as well in the dark as a normal human.

d6: You can sense the surface emotions or thoughts of a person (reading body language, smelling fear, minor telepathy).

d8: You can see perfectly well in nearly dark surroundings or track individuals by scent.

d10: You can always sense people around you, even without sight (telepathy, scent, etc.); or you can read the thoughts and emotions of someone you concentrate on intensely.

d12: You can see in total absence of light, through obscuring smoke, or objects (perfect echo location, x-ray vision, radio scanning).

Wholly new senses, like telepathy, require your Game Master's permission. They often require new rules, depending on the setting.

This Trait may be taken along with the Impaired Senses Complication, as long as they reflect two different senses. (For example, one could be blind but possess a super-hearing that acts almost as radar.) This Trait may be taken more than once to reflect multiple Enhancements.

Faith (d2+)

You possess faith in a greater power. This faith carries you through dark places, and maybe even other people as well. Whenever dealing with people who share or admire your faith, unless you have personally offended them or given them reason to distrust your sincerity, add your Trait die to any rolls to influence them.

d4: If you possess this Trait at d4 or higher, your faith is strong enough to stand out. Once per session, you may add your Faith die to any roll involving your Willpower, as it strengthens your personality.

d8: If you possess this Trait at d8 or higher, you may (with the Game Master's permission) be a leader in your faith tradition. What benefits this status grants depends on the position of the character, as well as the story they are involved in; whether or not this gives them a following or any influence is up to the Game Master's discretion. Also note that a character can be a leader in a faith tradition without any Faith at all!

Fast Healer (d6/d12)

You get up and about more quickly than most. Add your Trait die to recovery rolls. In addition, your recovery rate is increased, as follows:

d6: You recover from damage at twice normal rate.

d12: You recover from damage at four times the normal rate.

Fast on your Feet (d2/d6/d12)

You move quickly. Your base movement speed increases according to the value of your Trait die, as follows:

d2: Base speed plus five feet.

d6: Base speed plus 10 feet.

d12: Base speed plus 20 feet

Focused Hunter (d2–d6)

You're particularly good at capturing or killing a particular type of critter. Pick a type of animal or creature approved by the Game Master, be it llama or vampire. You may add your Trait die to any rolls or actions to know unusual facts about your target prey (most of which you are assumed to know anyway), identify signs of them or notice them, or to attack them (directly or indirectly). There are limits to when this applies, and the Game Master may overrule certain types of creatures for this Trait.

Formidable Presence (d2+)

You project an aura of authority or fear. Add your Trait die to rolls to bully people into doing what you want, make people back down, or generally intimidate others. Most supernatural creatures (though certainly not all) will simply fail to be any more intimidated by a mortal than they would be otherwise. This won't work on non-sentient creatures, either.

d6+: If you have this Trait at d6 or higher, any Plot Points you use on rolls that include this Trait count for more. Increase the bonus die you get from spending Plot Points by a +2 step. This only works on Plot Points spent before the roll, not those you spend after.

Good Natured (d2+)

You're always cheerful and easygoing, and so people are often nice back. Whenever dealing socially with people in a casual manner, or in non-threatening and non-intimate settings, your jovial manner helps you persuade or otherwise Influence them. Add your Trait die to rolls where your cheerful nature makes things go smoothly. Good Natured won't help when a situation is stressful and everyone's already on edge, or if the target already distrusts you—things like that prevent you from putting them at their ease.

d6+: If you have this Trait at d6 or higher, any Plot Points you use on rolls that include this Trait count for more. Increase the bonus die you get from spending Plot Points by a +2 step. This only works on Plot Points spent before the roll, not those you spend after.

d12+: If your Good Natured Trait die is d12 or higher, people always feel more relaxed around you, even if they know they should be on their guard. You're just so damned friendly that they feel like being friendly back—they might kick themselves for it later, but your Good Nature can even help you persuade hostile foes to let you live.

Hardy Constitution (d2+)

You have the constitution of an ox. You can eat and drink almost anything with no ill effects. Add your Trait die to rolls to resist the effects of alcohol, drugs, poisons, radiation, toxins, and dangerous atmospheric conditions.

Head for Numbers (d2+)

Numbers just make sense for you, be it doing arithmetic at lightning speed, solving complex algebra, or creating algorithms to solve difficult problems. When your math genius comes into play you may add your Trait die to the action.

d6+: If you have this Trait at d6 or higher, any Plot Points you use on rolls that include this Trait count for more. Increase the bonus die you get from spending Plot Points by a +2 step. This only works on Plot Points spent before the roll, not those you spend after.

Healer's Touch (d2+)

When it comes to dealing with illness, treating wounds, or comforting those on death's door, you have instincts that came before any sort of formal training.

You may add your Trait die when diagnosing or dealing with anything related to healing—including magical or weird-science medicine if the setting supports such things.

d6+: If you have this Trait at d6 or higher, any Plot Points you use on rolls that include this Trait count for more. Increase the bonus die you get from spending Plot Points by a +2 step. This only works on Plot Points spent before the roll, not those you spend after.

Hideout (d6/d12)

You have a bolthole, a safe place that no one knows about. Unless you lead people there, let them know it exists, or bring down an extensive manhunt on your head, no one will be able to find you there. Multiple characters may take this Asset and combine their Hideouts, either increasing the capacity or the comfort levels.

d6: Your hideout is just big enough to accommodate you and a couple of others, giving you a place to live, but not comfortably. Generally, it will be stocked with enough food to eat sparingly, blankets and basic furniture, small sources of warmth, water, and the equivalent of a first aid kit.

d12: Your hideout is capable of supporting up to a dozen people in the same accommodations as above.

Higher Education (d2+)

You gained the full benefit of a university degree, guild training, or some other form of study—meaning you sat up straight, paid attention, and retained what you learned. You may add your Trait die when recalling information that you may have studied in school. It needs to relate to your education background and be approved by the Game Master.

Immune (d8/d12/d12+d4/d12+d8)

Immunity is exactly that—complete immunity to something specific. This Trait is not available in many settings, and never possessed by normal humans, so discuss with the Game Master what type of Immunity you want and why you qualify for it. What you're immune to determines at what level you buy the Trait. Even when appropriate, this Trait is almost never available to players above d8 unless it's a very high-powered storyline!

d8: Immunities to individual natural threats—non-mystical diseases and poisons, natural fire, extreme cold, and so on. You do not suffer harm from the selected source, though secondary effects might cause problems (being Immune to fire doesn't make you Immune to smoke inhalation as well). Immunities do not apply to weapon types or very broad categories at this level—so you could be "Immune to pistol fire" but not bullets in general, you could be "Immune to swords" but not bladed weapons in general, or "Immune to iron" but not to all metals.

d12: This level allows you Immunity to broader categories of mundane things—harsh environmental conditions, poisons and diseases (mystical ones included), bladed weapons, fire and heat (mystical or otherwise), bullets, metal, and so on.

d12 + d4: Immunities of this rank are against whole categories of things: weapons, magic, creature attacks, debilitating conditions and effects, time, and so on. Be warned—these are very powerful abilities, and should not be lightly given into the hands of players!

d12 + d8: This level of Immunity is also known as Invulnerability, and represents Immunity to all physical harm, regardless of the source. It does not necessarily mean that attacks or spells have no effect at all—but they can't kill the being that has this Trait! Severed limbs grow back within seconds, and the character effectively "heals" at whatever rate he chooses. However, he may still feel pain or suffering, depending on his nature.

Creatures with this level of Immunity don't even have to choose what they are Immune to—though they do have to choose one thing to which they are vulnerable. The substance can be as specific as a particular chemical (rock salt is always a popular choice), type of plant (sharpened branch of a cypress tree), or object (quartz). Contact with the substance causes normal damage if it is used as a weapon. Continual contact causes continual damage, even if the contact would not normally be harmful; the substance is caustic to the creature. The Game Master should decide exactly how much and how quickly the substance deals damage, keeping in mind that it will not be instantaneously lethal despite causing much more damage than it would in normal circumstances.

In Plain Sight (d2+)

You have a tendency to fade into the background, avoid notice, or otherwise have the ability to hide more effectively than most. Add your Trait die to rolls to avoid notice when hiding in plain sight, to disguise yourself as another (nonspecific) person, and to move stealthily.

d6+: If you have this Trait at d6 or higher, any Plot Points you use on rolls that include this Trait count for more. Increase the bonus die you get from spending Plot Points by a +2 step. This only works on Plot Points spent before the roll, not those you spend after.

d12+: If your In Plain Sight Trait die is d12 or higher, you can appear so inconsequential as to avoid notice in an empty room simply by leaning casually against the wall and looking like you belong. You can pretend to be a janitor simply by grabbing a uniform cap and pulling it down over your eyes, a reporter by having a notepad, and so on. Make a disguise roll as normal (adding the Trait die to the roll), but you don't need much preparation.

Inherent Armor (d2+)

You benefit from protection against injury without having to actually wear armor. When taking this Trait, you receive an automatic Armor Rating (choose Wound or Stun when you take the Trait) equal to half of the Trait die's maximum value. This armor can't normally be lost, nor can extraordinary successes bypass it as they do most armor. In some game worlds, it may be appropriate for this to come with an inherent weakness to something particular—a way for enemies to circumvent this armor. For example, a shape shifter might possess Inherent Armor but not benefit from it while in contact with silver, or against silver weapons. Achilles, the legendary hero, is an example of somebody who possesses extremely high Inherent Armor, but with a vulnerable spot on one heel.

Inherent Weapons (d2+)

Whether it's claws, spikes, or built-in cyberweapons, you're always carrying. The weapon should probably be melee or close ranged, though your Game Master might be willing to negotiate long-range weaponry.

When taking this Trait, discuss the nature of the weapon with the Game Master. Using the weapon requires a roll like any other attack (Strength or Agility + Melee Weapons, typically). If your attack succeeds, the initial damage is Basic as usual but your Armed Trait die is a damage die that inflicts Wounds.

This Trait may be taken more than once to reflect multiple natural/supernatural weapons or forms of attack. If Inherent Weapons is meant to represent an attack that does more than simple damage (for example, inflicts a paralytic poison, is corrosive, etc), the Game Master should set the cost of the Asset higher by one or two steps than the damage die to compensate for the added ability.

Intuitive Leaps (d4/d8/d12)

You have trustworthy hunches, and make good decisions even without all the information. You have an easy time sensing when someone is lying to you. Add your Trait die to any rolls to determine the truth of someone's statements.

d4: Once per session, you may ask the Game Master a question which they must answer as truthfully as possible with yes, no, or maybe/it depends. They need not elaborate on the reasoning behind the answer.

d8: As above, but you may ask twice per session.

d12: As above, but you may ask three times per session, and you may spend Plot Points to ask additional questions. Each extra question costs a Plot Point.

Light Sleeper (d4)

You wake up at the slightest noise or disturbance. Though sometimes it seems more like a curse than a blessing, it does mean that you are easily roused in the face of danger. You may add your Trait die to any roll that would allow you to wake up from a disturbance, or spend a Plot Point and you wake up automatically. There is a drawback, that if you are trying to sleep in noisy or otherwise difficult conditions you'll suffer from fatigue (see Fatigue in **Chapter 5: Rules**), but if that happens the Game Master should give you a few Plot Points for your trouble.

Lightning Reflexes (d2+)

You're lightning quick. Add your Trait die to all Initiative rolls and rolls to react quickly to danger (getting out of the way of a grenade, for example). This Trait may also apply to other rolls at the Game Master's discretion, but only when the roll is a measure of reaction time, not speed.

Longevity (d2+)

For some reason, your lifespan extends far beyond natural expectations. Barring accident, illness, or injury, you can expect to live a number of years equal to the normal average multiplied by the maximum of your Longevity Trait die (so if you have a d4 in this Trait, multiply your lifespan by four, and so on). You may start out at any age within your lifespan; while being old does not confer any bonuses it might provide a good reason for having other highly unusual Traits (enormous numbers of Contacts, or extremely Uncommon Knowledge, etc).

d12+: If your Longevity Trait die is equal to d12 or greater, you are effectively Immortal. Barring accident, illness, or injury, you can expect to live forever.

Loyal Companion (d4/d8/d12)

You have a pet, familiar, apprentice, sidekick, or some other creature that sticks by you through thick or thin. Your companion may be of any type, background, or description that the Game Master approves—with the following guidelines, depending on the level of this Trait. The character or creature might have some small supernatural means of communication or empathic bond that's bundled with the Trait. You can generally guide the actions of a companion and roll for its actions, but it is technically a supporting character and subject to the Game Master's decisions.

d4: Your companion is useful only in a minor way, such as scouting ahead, helping you with everyday tasks, or offering up some occaisional advice. It does not participate in combat unless it's ready to sacrifice itself to

save your life. Examples: A mute child who serves as your scout, a meerkat familiar that can fetch small items on command, or a talking skull.

d8: The companion is much more active in helping you, and might be even be useful in a fight—though it can only be about half as effective as a Novice character **(see Chapter 2: Characters)**. Examples: A trained wolf, an eagle totem animal, or a cowardly alien sidekick.

d12: Your companion is a full character in its own right, with the skills and abilities equal to a Novice. Examples: A native warrior who owes a life-debt, a magically bound leopard, or an android bodyguard.

Lucky (d4/d8/d12)

You're blessed with good fortune. Sometimes, you can scrape by when others would have failed.

d4: Once per session, you may reroll all the dice on any non-botched roll, and use the better of the two results.

d8: Twice per session, you may reroll all the dice of any roll, including botches, and use the better of the two results.

d12: Three times per session, you may reroll all the dice of any roll, including botches, and use the better of the two results.

Natural Athlete (d2+)

You're in great condition and you know your own limits, as well as how to push them effectively. Add your Natural Athlete die to any roll involving endurance, conditioning, or long-term physical activity, such as swimming, climbing, or playing a sport. This doesn't help you in short-term burst actions like making attacks, but it does help fight fatigue in extended combat, and does help you stay alive or conscious when wounds risk putting you down. Also, you may choose to exhaust yourself in order to perform above your normal levels. You may voluntarily suffer Stun damage to add Plot Points to rolls this Trait benefits. Every point of Stun you choose to suffer adds a Plot Point to the roll. You can't choose to suffer more Stun than it takes to knock you out.

d6+: If you have this Trait at d6 or higher, any Plot Points you use on rolls that include this Trait count for more. Increase the bonus die you get from spending Plot Points by a +2 step. This only works on Plot Points spent before the roll, not those you spend after.

d12+: If your Natural Athlete Trait die is d12 or higher, you may make one additional Second Wind roll per day. Only the most conditioned people in the world have your level of stamina.

Natural Leader (d2+)

You are a natural-born leader. Add your Trait die to any rolls to persuade or intimidate your followers or those who believe they are under your command into following your orders.

d6+: If you have this Trait at d6 or higher, any Plot Points you use on rolls that include this Trait count for more. Increase the bonus die you get from spending Plot Points by a +2 step. This only works on Plot Points spent before the roll, not those you spend after.

d12+: If your Natural Leader Trait die is d12 or higher, you can inspire people to legendary heights. You can adjust the Plot Point expenditures of allies in earshot of you just as you may adjust your own (per the d6 level).

Natural Linguist (d2+)

You've got an ear for languages and can learn a new one with remarkable ease. You can pick up specific dialects and recreate accents with little effort. This talent helps you blend in with the locals no matter where you wind up. By listening to people talk, you get a pretty good idea of where they are from. You can add your Trait die to any action to either understand an unusual language or to pass off a convincing dialect or accent.

Photographic Memory (d4/d8)

You have the ability to recall information and material that you have studied for at least 30 seconds.

d4: Your eidetic memory has limits. You can only retain a number of articles of information perfectly equal to the maximum result of your Intelligence die.

d8: You have almost perfect recall of anything you have seen, read, or studied. If it is something obscure, a Game Master may call for a Hard Intelligence + Intelligence + Trait die roll, or require a Plot Point to be spent in extreme circumstances.

Quick Learner (d2+)

You pick things up pretty quickly. Once a session, you may use your Quick Learner Trait die as a Skill die for a Skill you do not have. You must have either another character with the desired Skill spend a minute instructing you in the Skill, or have 10 minutes to practice or passively observe other Skilled characters. Once you have chosen the Skill (pick a General Skill and, if you have d8+, a single Specialty), your Trait stays locked into that Skill for the remainder of the session or until the Game Master decides the effect should wear off. Skills obtained through Quick Learner won't last for more than 24 hours in either case.

You may use Quick Learner to substitute for a Skill you already have, but unless Quick Learner is higher than the Skill/Specialty combination you select, it provides no benefit. This use of the Trait does not require a Skilled character to instruct you.

Rank and Privilege (d2+)

You possess a special rank within a government, organization, or body of people. Exactly what this rank is and what privileges it grants will be entirely dependent upon the setting of your game. A modern-day character could be a policeman or a state Senator; a medieval character could be a duke or even an emperor; a character living on a spaceship might be a captain or fleet admiral. While this Trait can't replicate the effects of other Traits (if you want to be a rich merchant-baron, you need to select the Trait Wealthy separately), discuss with the Game Master what it does provide. It might provide an excuse to have Assets you otherwise could not possess.

Reputation (d2+)

You have a reputation that benefits you. People are more likely to trust, fear, love, or believe in you, depending on how you came by this reputation. Determine this Trait's background with the assistance of your Game Master and identify a group of people for whom this Trait applies. When dealing with these people, add your Reputation Trait die to all Influence rolls unless the particular group being targeted has been given reason to doubt your reputation.

Shadow (d2/d6/d10)

You're off the radar. It's nearly impossible to find any dirt on you, and if you're careful enough, things will stay that way. How invisible you are depends on your investment in this Trait.

d2: You keep a clean record. A background check uncovers the basics: birth date, full legal name, and so on, but no suspicious or illegal activity can be traced to you by records, and there is little to no information on purchases, jobs, awards, your education, and so on, though place of residence and current employment will be findable.

d6: The only available information on you consists of your birth certificate, location of birth, and perhaps your current location; no information about what you have been up to can be found, and all of the above is difficult to find without extensive searching.

d10: You don't exist. There are no records of you, anywhere—your name isn't on file with anyone, no one can find out where you came from, and there isn't anything they can do about it save question you or those who know you directly.

Signature Item (d2/d8/d12)

There's an item that somehow become part of your character. It is something that helps define you, and you can't be deprived of it for long. Your Signature Item will eventually come back to you if lost, stolen, or badly damaged. If the story does deprive you of your item, the Game Master will reward you with some Plot Points. The nature of the item depends on the level you took of this Trait.

d2: Your item is something relatively minor and does not serve much useful function, but it still identifies you. Examples: A hat, pair of sunglasses, or a disctinctive coin.

d8: The Signature Item is still something that can be carried or worn but serves a significant use. Examples: A snub-nosed pistol, an alien soundwave screwdriver, or an ancestral sword.

d12: The Signature Item is something large or powerful, and could be of use to more than just you. Examples: A small transport spaceship, a magical staff that hurls fire, or a classic automobile that roars when you step on the gas.

Simple Needs (d2+)

You don't need that much to stay alive—in fact, you might even not *be* alive.

This Asset reduces your basic need for food, water, and air. For every step (d2–d4–d6–d8, etc) you have in this Trait, one of those three needs is halved; if a second step is devoted to the same need, it is reduced to a very small amount, or it becomes extremely conditional. For example, you might devote 2 steps to food and 2 steps to water (with a d8 in Simple Needs) and decide that you no longer need to eat or drink, but still have to occasionally drink blood to sustain yourself. Of course, rather than being a vampire, at the same level of this Trait you might instead be an android, and only need occasional recharging.

At the Game Master's discretion, this Asset may include variants of these normal needs. For example, a character might devote 1 step to their need for air and become able to breathe under water.

Steady Calm (d2+)

You're hard to shake and always appear to keep your wits about you. Add your Trait die to all rolls to resist being frightened, intimidated, or otherwise mentally unbalanced. This Trait also aids you in resisting torture or coercion.

d6+: If you have this Trait at d6 or higher, any Plot Points you use on rolls that include this Trait count for more. Increase the bonus die you get from spending Plot Points by a +2 step. This only works on Plot Points spent before the roll, not those you spend after.

d12+: If your Steady Calm Trait die is d12 or higher, you can't normally be surprised, frightened, or affected by anything that this Trait would help you resist. Only the most extreme situations warrant a roll.

Sure Footed (d2+)

You have an inborn sense of balance that goes beyond your natural agility, making it easier for you to keep your feet on difficult terrain and making it harder for others to knock you off your feet. You may add your Trait die when attempting feats that require balance (walking a tightrope over a four-story drop) or on reactions to unusual situations or shifting terrain (such as not getting knocked off the catwalk when the spaceship is rocked by an explosion). This is not added to every feat of acrobatics you attempt, only situations where balance is the most important factor.

d6+: If you have this Trait at d6 or higher, any Plot Points you use on rolls that include this Trait count for more. Increase the bonus die you get from spending Plot Points by a +2 step. This only works on Plot Points spent before the roll, not those you spend after.

Talented (d2+)

You have a knack for a certain type of action or ability. Pick two thematically related Specialty Skills (*not* General Skills); the Game Master must approve your choices. Whenever rolling any of these Skills, add your Trait die.

Tough (d4/d8/d12)

You're hard to take down. You could be physically massive, or just hardier than normal. Add half of the value of your Trait die to your Life Points. For example, as a d4 Trait you character would gain two additional Life Points. You may also add your Trait die to any rolls you make to keep from dying, shrug off fatigue, or endure pain and suffering.

Two-Handed Fighting (d4)

You're trained to fight or shoot with either hand and don't suffer the normal –2 Skill step for fighting with your off hand, though you do still accumulate penalties for multiple actions. If you use both weapons against the same target, you may choose to make a single attack and gain a +1 Skill step. You must choose a specific General Skill (such as Guns, Melee Weapons, or Unarmed Combat) and you must purchase this Trait separately for each additional Skill. This doesn't actually make you ambidextrous, which usually applies to fine motor skills like handwriting and doesn't aid in combat (see the Ambidexterity Asset).

Unbreakable Will (d2+)

You are hard to influence through extraordinary means. You might be well trained in mental discipline, or you could just be stubborn. Add your Trait die to all rolls to resist unnatural compulsions: torture, magical fear, mind control, demonic possession, and so forth. The Game Master may also roll secretly to see if your uncompromising mentality can see through illusions.

d6+: If you have this Trait at the d6 level or higher, you can spend a Plot Point to shake off *any* compulsion, no matter how powerful, for at least a short time. Roll your Trait die, and come back to your senses for that number of turns.

Uncommon Knowledge (d6–d10)

You possess knowledge of some topic or field that almost no one else does; it might be secret, or it may simply be very obscure. Discuss with the Game Master what kind of knowledge it might be, and if this Trait is appropriate or not. If so, ask him what level it would need to be. This Trait is highly subjective, so be sure it covers something that will actually add to your character! The Trait die may be used together with an attribute to make a Skill roll, in place of an existing Skill, especially if your rating is greater than any dice in such General Skills as Knowledge or Science.

Unnatural Healing (d6/d12)

You may recover from injury by unusual means.

d6: You may perform a task, ritual, or action to heal yourself. This requires some kind of resource that is expended (blood, nanites, enchanted crystals, chalk and string, etc). It also requires at least half an hour of time, and either a roll of some kind with a Difficulty of Average to Hard (to subdue a mortal to feed on, to activate the ritual energy, or to pull yourself literally back together) or a 1–3 Plot Point expenditure to circumvent the roll. The Difficulty or number of Plot Points required increases in harsher situations. If you meet the requirements of the ritual, you roll your Trait die and recover from that many points of damage (Wound first, with leftover points eliminating Stun). This may be repeated until you are fully healed or circumstances prevent it. You can't perform your ritual while incapacitated (unconscious, etc).

d12: As above. Also, every time you perform your ritual, you may heal a second time if you wish—and that second time can be saved until necessary. This acts as an additional Second Wind, save that you roll your Trait die instead, and the healing removes both Stun and Wound damage. You can't retain more than one healing attempt at a time this way, but you *can* activate this additional healing while otherwise incapacitated.

Wealthy (d4/d8)

You may not have high-tech gadgets or weird mystical abilities, but you do have plenty of good, old-fashioned cash. Add your Trait die to any negotiation or

Table 3.1: Assets

Name	d2	d4	d6	d8	d10	d12
Air of Mystery ✖			■			
Allure	■	■	■	■	■	■
Alternate Identity	■	■	■			
Ambidextrous	■					
Animal Empathy	■	■	■	■	■	■
Attuned to Nature	■	■	■	■	■	■
Attuned to Technology	■	■	■	■	■	■
Blue Blood	■	■	■			
Born Behind the Wheel	■	■	■	■	■	■
Brawler	■	■	■			
Combat Ready					■	
Constructed ✖				■		
Contacts	■	■	■	■	■	■
Danger Sense ✖		■		■		
Destiny ✖						■
Devoted to a Cause			■			
Enhanced Communication ✖	■	■	■	■	■	■
Enhanced Manipulation ✖	■	■	■	■	■	■
Enhanced Movement ✖	■	■	■	■	■	■
Enhanced Senses ✖	■	■	■	■	■	■
Faith	■	■	■	■	■	■
Fast Healer ✖			■			■
Fast on your Feet	■		■			■
Focused Hunter	■	■	■			
Formidable Presence	■	■	■	■	■	■
Good Natured	■	■	■	■	■	■
Hardy Constitution	■	■	■	■	■	■
Head for Numbers	■	■	■	■	■	■
Healers Touch	■	■	■	■	■	■
Hideout			■			■

Name	d2	d4	d6	d8	d10	d12
Higher Education	■	■	■	■	■	■
Immune ✖				■		■
In Plain Sight	■	■	■	■	■	■
Inherent Armor ✖	■	■	■	■	■	■
Inherent Weapon ✖	■	■	■	■	■	■
Intuitive Leaps		■		■		■
Light Sleeper		■				
Lightning Reflexes	■	■	■	■	■	■
Longevity ✖	■	■	■	■	■	■
Loyal Companion		■		■		■
Lucky		■		■		■
Natural Athlete	■	■	■	■	■	■
Natural Leader	■	■	■	■	■	■
Natural Linguist	■	■	■	■	■	■
Photographic Memory		■		■		
Quick Learner	■	■	■	■	■	■
Rank and Privilege	■	■	■	■	■	■
Reputation	■	■	■	■	■	■
Shadow	■		■		■	
Signature Item	■			■		■
Simple Needs ✖	■	■	■	■	■	■
Steady Calm	■	■	■	■	■	■
Sure Footed	■	■	■	■	■	■
Talented	■	■	■	■	■	■
Tough		■		■		■
Two-Handed Fighting		■				
Unbreakable Will	■	■	■	■	■	■
Uncommon Knowledge			■	■	■	
Unnatural Healing ✖			■			■
Wealthy		■		■		

Shaded areas designate available trait levels.

Table 3.2: Complications

Name	d2	d4	d6	d8	d10	d12
Absent Minded	■	■	■			
Addiction		■	■	■	■	
Allergy	■			■		
Amnesia		■		■		
Amorous		■	■	■		
Anger Issues	■	■				
Animal Emnity	■	■	■			
Bleeder					■	
Combat Paralysis		■		■		
Complex Needs ✖	■	■	■	■	■	■
Contrarian		■				
Coward		■	■	■		
Criminal Past			■			
Crude		■	■	■		
Dead Broke		■		■		
Dead inside		■	■			
Duty		■		■		■
Eerie Presence ✖	■	■	■	■	■	■
Forked Tongue			■			
Fragile		■		■		■
Glory Hound	■	■				
Greedy		■	■	■		
Gullible	■	■	■	■	■	■
Honest to a Fault	■	■	■			
Hooked		■		■		
Idealist	■	■	■			
Illiterate		■		■		
Illness		■		■		■
Impaired Communication	■	■	■	■	■	■
Impaired Manipulation	■	■	■	■	■	■
Impaired Movement	■	■	■	■	■	■
Impaired Senses	■	■	■	■	■	■
Infamy	■	■	■	■	■	■

Name	d2	d4	d6	d8	d10	d12
Insatiable Curiosity			■			
Klepto	■		■		■	
Klutz		■		■		
Lazy		■				
Lightweight	■	■	■	■		
Little Person	■					
Low Pain Threshold			■			
Memorable	■	■	■	■		
Neatfreak		■		■		
Nonhealing ✖				■		■
On the Run		■		■		■
Out for Blood		■		■		
Overconfident		■	■	■	■	
Overweight	■	■	■			
Pacifist			■			■
Paralyzed				■		
Paranoid		■				
Phobia	■	■	■	■	■	■
Prejudice		■				
Pyro					■	
Rebellious		■				
Rival	■	■	■	■	■	■
Rotten Luck		■		■		■
Shy			■			
Smartass		■				
Stingy		■	■			
Strange Luck ✖			■			■
Superstitious	■		■			
Toes the Line		■				
Traumatic Flashes		■		■		
Ugly	■	■	■			
Unstable		■	■	■	■	■
Weak Stomach		■	■	■		

Shaded areas designate available trait levels.

bartering roll on which you are spending some of your excess cash to sweeten the deal—either directly, or by buying drinks, giving gifts, and so on.

d4: You start with one and a half the normal starting funds. You also receive a monthly stipend without needing to work—maybe from a fund or rich parents. You and your Game Master should settle on what this means, but basically you don't normally have to worry about the day-to-day cost of living. For example, a modern-day Veteran character might start with 4,000 dollars, so a Wealthy d4 character would start with 6,000.

d8: As above, but starting funds are triple that of standard, non-Wealthy character. Your cost of living now extends into the most lavish versions of everything and a large chunk of cash on hand. A modern-day Veteran character might start with 4,000 dollars, so a Wealthy d8 character would start with 12,000 dollars.

Complications

Absent Minded (d2–d6)

Whether you're a knuckle-dragging moron or a certified genius, you tend to forget things and can be easily distracted by new ideas or outside stimulation. It makes it difficult to stay organized and on task. This is primarily a role playing Trait, but it also causes the Trait die to be added to the Difficulty of rolls to remember things or when concentrating when there are distractions present.

Addiction (d4–d10)

You are physically addicted to something. It could be cigarettes, alcohol, painkillers, human blood, or almost anything—but you need it, and if you can't get it, you go into withdrawal. The level of this Complication depends on the nature of the addiction. Something legal, with few immediate risks and nonfatal withdrawal symptoms (being a smoker or a functioning alcoholic) would be rated d4 or d6. Addiction to substances that cause more problems, have worse withdrawal symptoms, or are illegal (or supernatural) likely have a higher die rating.

Depending on the addiction, the time between required fixes could vary from eight hours to a week. Minor symptoms include headaches (–1 Attribute step to all rolls from inability to concentrate), the shakes (inability to perform delicate actions), frequent nausea and vomiting, or confusion that manifests on and off constantly. Severe symptoms can cause dire problems, like blacking out randomly, violent rages, bleeding, cardiac arrest, and so on. Also, you may experience social side effects from indulging your addiction (the Game Master may add your Trait die to the Difficulty of social rolls or have supporting characters respond unfavorably upon meeting you), your health may degrade, or you may be incapacitated while "fixing."

Note: If you're addicted to something psychological you have the Complication known as Hooked.

Allergy (d2/d8)

You're allergic to something fairly common.

d2: Your allergy isn't life threatening, but it can set you to sneezing, getting a bit dizzy, feeling sick, and so on. Whenever you encounter the allergen, you suffer two points of Stun damage on initial contact. This damage can't be recovered until the allergen is removed or you receive medication, at which point it begins healing normally. Symptoms continue until this Stun damage is gone—you sneeze, cough, and the Game Master adds your Trait die to the Difficulty of all actions you take.

d8: Your allergy could kill you. Whenever you encounter the allergen, make a Resistance (Vitality + Vitality) roll against a Difficulty of 7 plus your Trait die; an Average Difficulty, but the Game Master rolls and adds the Complication's die against you. If you succeed, treat the exposure as above, adding your Trait die to the Difficulty of all your actions until the Stun damage heals. If you fail the Resistance roll, you go into shock and begin convulsing. Unless properly medicated, you suffer your Trait die in Basic damage every two minutes until you die, whether or not the allergen is removed.

Allergy can also be used to represent supernatural weaknesses. For example, a vampire might be Allergic (d2) to garlic and Allergic (d8) to true faith. The descriptive symptoms of supernatural weaknesses like these may be very different from normal allergic reactions, however, so be sure to discuss with the Game Master exactly what happens to your character in the presence of their weakness. He might also wish to set another die level for an unusual Allergy, depending on how dangerous or uncommon it is.

Amnesia (d4/d8)

You are missing a chunk of memory. At the d4 level it means you're missing a significant block of time, perhaps months or even years, but you still know who you are and remember most of your life—with the "lost" time a complete blank. At d8, this Trait means you have total amnesia, not having a clue about your real name (unless someone who knows tells you) and you can't remember anything beyond little feelings urged by memory triggers. You possess all of your skills and reflexes from your previous life, even though you can't remember it.

Note: If you take this Trait, it's just asking for the Game Master to screw with you. Even if you decide an explanation for your charcter's amnesia (head injury, alien mind ray, etc.), that is only what your character believes happened. The Game Master may weave your problem into the story however he sees fit and you're not allowed to whine about it. You've been warned!

Amorous (d4–d8)

You tend to let your hormones get the better of you, and you are known to make questionable decisions based on your sexual urges. How successful you are depends on your character, the circumstances, the targets of your desire—but with this Trait the motive is there even if you get rejected time and again. While this is principally up to you to role play, your predilections could garner you a bad name. When trying to Influence those you hurt or offend, add your Trait die to all Difficulties. You must also add the Trait die to the Difficulties when resisting persuasion that takes advantage of your sexually charged personality.

Anger Issues (d2–d4)

Your temper often gets the better of you. While this doesn't mean you go berserk, or even show it outwardly, you are easily offended or put off by others, and frequently make bad or rash decisions. While this is principally up to you to role play, those who know about your temper may be less likely to trust you. Add your Trait die to the Difficulty of convincing such a person to rely on you to do the right thing or keep your cool, and don't expect leaders to be too happy about your outbursts.

Animal Emnity (d2–d6)

Critters just don't seem to like you. The small, shy ones run away or hide from you, while the big nasty ones with teeth snarl and may even attack if you give them half an excuse. When this happens for no good reason other than your Trait, you may earn some extra Plot Points, and you're forced to add the Trait die to the Difficulty of any action in which you are trying to calm or command an animal.

Bleeder (d10)

Some condition you suffer from or medication you take causes you to bleed without clotting. Best if you don't get cut, shot, stabbed, or even badly bruised. If you suffer any Wound damage at all, you begin to bleed (see, **Chapter 5: Rules**), and suffer 1 additional Wound damage every other combat turn until the bleeding is stopped (a Hard action).

Combat Paralysis (d4/d8)

You freeze up during situations of conflict or confrontation, and have trouble deciding what to do or how to act. It could be fear, or merely plain indecision, but it stalls you.

d4: At this level, when combat begins, roll your Trait die. For that many turns, you can't make any offensive actions. For the first turn, you can't even make any defensive actions! This makes you something of a sitting duck, able only to roll Innate Defense.

d8: At this level, roll your Trait die at the beginning of combat. You can't make any offensive actions during that number of turns, and for the first half of that time (rounding up), you can't even make defensive actions.

Complex Needs (d2–d8)

Your basic needs—sleep, food, drink, shelter—suffer from some form of restriction, limitation, or additional requirement. If you break the restriction or fail to meet the additional requirement, you are penalized until you address it. The level at which you take this Complication reflects its severity.

You and your Game Master must discuss the manner in which the penalty manifests, but typically the Difficulty of any actions you take once you have broken the restriction or failed to meet the additional requirement is increased by the Complication's die roll. Appropriately penalized actions could include physical actions (you are nauseous, weak, etc) or social actions (your community is horrified that you have broken their laws, you are grouchy and irritable, etc.)

Some examples of Complex Needs include religious dietary restrictions (can't eat pork, can't eat without properly preparing the food, etc), medical necessity (must take a pill with breakfast, can't wear cotton clothing), or even a supernatural curse (can't sleep unless you're lying on the soil of your homeland, can't rest unless you're under the stars). The nature of the Complex Need will also determine how long the penalty lasts; it may last until you have atoned, or until you address the medical necessity, for instance.

You should take this Complication more than once if you have multiple Complex Needs.

Contrarian (d4)

You might feel sorry for them, or maybe you just make a habit out of lost causes, but you tend to find the underdog in any situation and put yourself firmly alongside them—until someone else becomes the underdog, anyway. While this is principally up to you to role play, it can also lead to being thought of as wishy-washy, juvenile, or immature—or it might make someone feel betrayed. When interacting with people who might dislike you because of this Trait, add the Trait die to the Difficulties of all social rolls.

Coward (d4–d8)

Perhaps you're brave from the waist up, but when danger rears its head your legs are carrying you the other direction. You don't want to get hurt, and you don't want to die. This is primarily a role playing Trait, but it may affect your ability to withstand interrogation, intimidation, torture, and the like, as well as making other people look down on you. In these situations, add your Trait die to the Difficulty of the appropriate rolls.

Criminal Past (d6)

You've been on the wrong side of the law. You have to be careful—people don't like convicts, and if you put one foot out of line, you could end up in prison again. Discuss this Trait with the Game Master to determine what your specific crime was and how it might affect your character.

Crude (d4–d8)

You're the type who thinks that if you can add a four-letter word to a sentence, you may as well add two. You probably still think "your mama" jokes are funny, and instead of learning what the second fork is for, you opt to eat with your fingers. While this is principally up to you to role play, the social consequences can quickly become both obvious and far-reaching. Add your Trait die to the Difficulty of all social interactions in situations where being Crude is a problem.

Dead Broke (d4/d8)

You don't have any sort of wealth, have barely any cash on-hand, and even when some falls your way it seems to vanish quickly.

d4: If you're keeping careful track of cash, you start with half the normal amount, and whenever you get a big score you lose half of it without any benefit (get ripped off on a deal, get mugged, drop it down a drain, whatever). If you're less worked up about penny-pinching, you might have some raggedy gear, and you rarely have enough money for more than lunch.

d8: As above, but divide starting cash by four, and lose all but a quarter of any money earned. You have patched clothing, almost no equipment that isn't vital to your survival, and usually have to go without lunch.

Dead Inside (d4–d6)

You just don't get it. And by that, you mean anything—at least, anything related to emotion, humor, or the like. Maybe you can't, since you're really a sociopath, because your mind is really a positronic network that isn't wired for emotion, or maybe you're just a grim, stoic individual with no sense of humor. You also probably fail to pick up on any tension, comments, humor, or hints related to emotional or intimate issues.

Duty (d4/d8/d12)

There's something you have to do, whether you like it or not. Depending on what this Duty is based on, the consequences for shirking it could be pretty bad … but then again, sticking to it might be dangerous, too.

Your Duty might represent any number of things: The requirements of your job, a personal code of honor, a family or clan responsibility, or a supernatural compulsion.

d4: If your Duty is relatively safe most of the time ("always help old ladies cross the street," "never miss a day at work"), or is solely self-imposed with no direct consequences for breaking it, this is the level for it.

d8: If your Duty puts you in the line of danger sometimes ("never leave a man behind," "defend your country," "always obey your superiors"), carries some important but nonlethal consequences for breaking it, or is essentially completely unavoidable but not too dangerous (compulsory military service during peace time), this is the level for it. Some supernatural restrictions, such as "can't enter a home uninvited" or "can't cross running water" would also fit here.

d12: If your Duty is likely to be extremely dangerous, carries life-threatening consequences for breaking it, or is unavoidable and probably risky (a magical compulsion to go on a dangerous quest, for example), this is the level for it.

Eerie Presence (d2+)

There's something about you that puts people on edge. Add your Trait die to the Difficulty of any rolls to interact with mortals (except when Intimidating them, this Trait doesn't provide a bonus to that). The exact effects change depending on the severity of your condition, and could result in extremely ill-mannered behavior.

At a very minor level, there aren't any extremely obvious things people can point out as being the problem—they just get an odd feeling about you. At slightly higher levels, like d6 or d8, people notice odd things out of the corner of their eyes, such as your reflection appearing monstrous, your shadow behaving oddly, and so on. You also might appear too pale, too gaunt, or strange in some other way that is still potentially normal. At extremely high levels, you cause a definite chill up people's spines, smell like death, or behave oddly enough that people are genuinely afraid of you. You should work out what, specifically, is odd about you when you take this Complication—talk it over with your Game Master. Also, most characters should not possess both Eerie Presence and Ugly, since their effects overlap significantly.

Forked Tongue (d6)

You are a compulsive liar. People quickly realize that you can't be trusted. While this is principally up to you to role play, lying at the wrong time or being known as a liar has serious consequences. Once somebody's caught on, add your Trait die to the Difficulty of all rolls to convince them you're telling the truth. This Trait compels you to lie, but it doesn't mean you're any good at it.

Fragile (d4/d8/d12)

Not only do you have a glass jaw, you've got a lot of other body parts that fit that description. If you have this Complication at d4, subtract 2 Life Points from your total. If it's d8, subtract 4. If it's d12, subtract 6. If you're trying to keep yourself from slipping unconscious due to pain, or avoid the effects of fatigue and injury, the Difficulty goes up by a roll of the Trait die.

Glory Hound (d2–d4)

You hog the spotlight, even if you don't deserve it or won't survive in it for long. You want everyone to know how impressive you are, and you'll do stupid stuff to make sure they do. While this is principally up to you to role play, you may wind up pissing people off or overlooking the consequences of your actions. When appropriate, add your Trait die to the Difficulty of rolls this Trait might interfere with.

Greedy (d4–d8)

Money is, in fact, the root of all happiness. You could always use a little more, even if you have to sell out your friends to get it. While this is principally up to you to role play, others might find your desperate, money-grubbing behavior more than a little off-putting (adding your Trait die to social rolls where this comes into play), or you may make decisions so ill considered that you wind up getting yourself in trouble.

Gullible (d2+)

You are fairly naive, and tend to take people at their word. This gets you into trouble, but being careful isn't your strong suit. This primarily comes through in role playing (the higher the Trait die, the more trusting you are), but you also add your Trait die to the Difficulty of any roll to determine if you are being lied to.

Honest to a Fault (d2-d6)

It's just not in your nature to lie. Maybe you were raised that way, or perhaps you're just too simple to really think to do so most of the time. Regardless, you have no poker face and have hard time lying even when you want to tell a good whopper. While this is principally up to you to role play (possibly earning some Plot Points), you must add your Trait die to any action in which you are trying to conceal the truth or tell a falsehood.

Hooked (d4/d8)

You are psychologically dependent on something that provides you with physical pleasure or stimulus (as opposed to drugs or alcohol, which comes under the Complication Addiction). You may be hooked on sex, gambling, playing video games, eating, etc. You simply can't get enough of what turns you on. As a d4 Trait, this complicates but does not dominate your life. You may be chubby because you're constantly scarfing down frosted strawberry breakfast pastries or you're flunking your History class because you're spending the time playing War of Worldcraft instead of studying. At d8 level, this problem is ruining your life. You've gambled away your savings and owe money to the mob. You were fired because you constantly loaded questionable websites from your desk. Your wife left because you can't keep your pants on. This is primarily a role playing Trait, but when presented with temptation related to your psychological dependency, all of your actions will have the Difficulties increased by the Trait die until you've satisfied your urges or the temptation goes away. You should really seek professional help.

Idealist (d2–d6)

You honestly believe that people are basically good, everything will work out for the best, and the universe is a nice place. In regard to at least one part of your life, you have an unrealistically optimistic outlook. While this is principally up to you to role play, you may have to add your Trait die to the Difficulty of rolls when your optimism clouds your judgment.

Illiterate (d4/d8)

The little squiggles just don't easily make words for you. For whatever reason, you never learned to read. At the d4 level, you can handle the basics (such as writing your name, reading often-used or short words) but you're not going to make your way through a long newspaper article or a novel anytime soon. At d8 you can't read or write at all, and couldn't even recognize your own name if it were written in big bold letters in front of you.

This Trait may be modified in value or eliminated from play entirely depending on the setting the Game Master has in mind. The listed values assume an importance for the written word roughly equal to modern society. It would go down in value (d2/d4 perhaps) in a more primitive culture where illiteracy was more common. And in a setting in which literacy was rare, this may be turned into a Literacy Asset that a player character could purchase during character creation.

Illness (d4/d8/d12)

Something's wrong with you, some sickness that isn't likely to disappear on its own. You may have some condition or syndrome, or you're maybe even stuck with something that will eventually end your life. For any of the levels of illness, add the Trait die to the Difficulty of any actions when your symptoms are an issue.

d4: You have a minor, permanent condition such as eczema or asthma that only bothers you infrequently.

d6: Your condition is something both more serious and frequently a problem, such as diabetes or early-stage multiple sclerosis. You probably are taking medication and special precautions to function normally, and even still are often affected.

d12: Better kiss your ass goodbye, because you have a fatal illness. It may be cancer, or a severe case of lupus. With proper medical treatment you might be able to function most of the day (and possibly even hide your condition) but over time your symptoms will worsen. Discuss this Trait with your Game Master if you choose to take it, to determine the nature, treatment, and timeline of your illness.

Impaired Communication (d2+)

Your ability to communicate is somehow inhibited. Any creature or character whose communication abilities are altered from the human norm can use this Complication to reflect that, whether they are an otherwise normal person or a lifeless golem. It is possible for this Trait to be non-supernatural.

Once a description/reason for your Impairment is agreed upon with the Game Master, select a rating. Some examples might be:

d4: Mangled speech (a monster who has trouble with human languages); poor grasp of the language.

d8: Can't speak any local languages; can't converse in human tongues at all; mute, uses sign language; can only communicate with own alien species.

d12: Can't read, write, or communicate in any way.

This Trait may be taken along with the Enhanced Communication Asset, as long as they reflect two different types of impairment. (For example, a character might be mute but possess the ability to project his thoughts telepathically.) This Trait may be taken more than once to reflect multiple impairments.

Impaired Manipulation (d2+)

Your ability to perform fine manipulation is somehow inhibited. Any creature or character whose manipulators are altered from the human norm can use this Complication to reflect that, whether they are a dog or a vehicle. It is possible for this Trait to be non-supernatural.

Once a description/reason for your Impairment is agreed upon with the Game Master, select a rating. Some examples might be:

d4: Missing arm with artificial (sub-par) replacement.

d8: Missing arm with no replacement; poor "hands" that have difficulty with human tools and objects.

d12: No hands or manipulators of any kind.

This Trait may be taken along with the Enhanced Manipulation Asset, as long as they reflect two different concepts. (For example, one could have no arms or hands yet might have telekinesis to move objects with his mind.) This Trait may be taken more than once to reflect multiple impairments.

Impaired Movement (d2+)

Your ability to move is somehow inhibited. Any creature or character whose movement is altered from the human norm can use this Complication to reflect that, whether they are a centaur or a sentient dolphin. It is possible for this Trait to be non-supernatural.

Once a description/reason for your Impairment is agreed upon with the Game Master, select a rating. Some examples might be:

d4: Missing leg with artificial (sub-par) replacement.

d6: Leg structure that has difficulty with most vehicles, human buildings, climbing, and so on (centaur, horse, etc).

d8: Missing leg with no replacement.

d12: Can't move under own power.

This Trait may be taken along with the Enhanced Movement Asset, as long as they reflect two different concepts. (For example, a character might walk slowly and awkwardly, yet be able to glide through the air with ease.) This Trait may be taken more than once to reflect multiple impairments.

Impaired Senses (d2+)

Your senses are somehow inhibited. Any creature or character whose sensory perceptions are altered from the human norm can use this Complication to reflect that, whether they are a bat or a genetically altered human. It is possible for this Trait to be non-supernatural.

Once a description/reason for your Impairment is agreed upon with the Game Master, select a rating. Some examples might be:

d4: Blinded by bright light; requires equipment (glasses, sunglasses, hearing aid) to function normally; extremely poor sense of smell/taste.

d8: Poor sense, such as a bat's sight.

d12: Blind; deaf; missing multiple, less-vital senses (no ability to smell/taste/feel).

This Trait may be taken along with the Enhanced Senses Asset, as long as they reflect two different senses. (For example, one could be blind but possess a super-hearing that acts almost as radar.) This Trait may be taken more than once to reflect multiple impairments.

Infamy (d2+)

You have an extremely negative reputation that makes it difficult to deal with people. Discuss the nature of this infamy with the Game Master. Which group of people feels this way about you? When dealing with people who would have a negative reaction to you, add your Trait die to the Difficulties of all social rolls. Your Infamy doesn't make you fearsome—just hated.

It is possible to have both Infamy and a Reputation, if they represent the attitudes of different groups of people toward you.

Insatiable Curiosity (d6)

It drives you crazy when something's going on and you don't know everything about it. You are driven to dig when a mystery presents itself, even when the investigation or the answer could be potentially hazardous to your health. Mysteries must be explored, be they mundane (which Vice President is the new girl in the office sleeping with?) or fantastic (where did the street gang get their hands on plasma-based weaponry?). This is primarily a role playing Trait, but you must add the Trait die to the Difficulties of mental and social actions when you are attempting a new or recent mystery. It's distracting you because you can't get it out of your head!

Klepto (d2/d6/d10)

You steal compulsively. This can annoy people, get you in trouble, and makes you the first suspect even when you didn't do anything wrong. Since you steal out of compulsion, and not out of necessity, you don't even have a self-justification to back you up. The die rating of the Trait represents what level of theft you are compelled to commit.

d2: You shoplift candy from drug stores, grab the change from someone's jacket pocket, and take the silverware from restaurants. Not likely to get you shot, but you never know.

d6: You like to live dangerously—you might break into cars, rob a house just to see if you can, or try to pick the pocket of a rich-looking guy because he might have a big chunk of dough on him.

d10: It's a surprise you're still alive—you can't go very long without committing serious theft. Jewelry stores, car theft, strings of major pickpocketings—you can't let it go at just one big score.

Klutz (d4/d8)

You have three or four left feet. For some reason, you can't seem to get the hang of balance and coordination, though since you do move rather chaotically, at least this doesn't make you any more likely to get hit in combat. Add your Trait die to the Difficulties of all rolls to move, catch something, throw something, or do anything else requiring coordination, other than defensive rolls. Also, you botch these rolls if all your dice come up showing either 1 or 2 (instead of botching if they all come up 1).

Lazy (d4)

If you spent as much time actually doing work as you do trying to get out of it, you'd be productive. Of course, you don't. While this is principally up to you to role play, you may have to add your Trait die to the Difficulty of rolls when your attitude causes problems.

Lightweight (d2–d8)

Your grandmother could drink you under the table. Add your Trait die to the Difficulty of all rolls to resist alchohol, drugs, disease, poisons, radiation, and environmental conditions.

Little Person (d2)

You're short. We're talking two-thirds to half the height of your peers short. This is an unusual Complication, since it has some benefits to go along with the problems. Reduce your base movement speed by two feet, and halve the distance you can jump. There might be social consequences, depending on who you're talking to. On the flip side, it's harder to hit you with a ranged attack or to spot you when you're hiding—add your Trait die *in your favor* in those situations. There may be other consequences, both positive and negative, as determined by the Game Master.

Low Pain Threshold (d6)

For you, a paper cut is a terrible laceration and the stinging pain of iodine on it brings tears to your eyes. You can't handle pain the same as normal people. The actual damage isn't any greater, but your reaction to it will always be stronger. You suffer 1 additional point of Stun damage any time you take damage at all. You must add this Trait die to the Difficulty of any rolls that involve resisting discomfort or pain—or the threat of either.

Memorable (d2–d8)

You stick out in a crowd and linger in peoples' memory for days or weeks. You might have a particularly striking feature, an aggressive demeanor, or a vivacious attitude that people remember easily, but it makes it easier for them to find you. Add your Trait die to the Difficulty of any roll to avoid being identified, or as a bonus to the die roll of anyone trying to notice or remember you. Alternately, the Game Master may just decide that you've been made without a roll—but at least you'll get some Plot Points!

Neatfreak (d4/d8)

You're worried about germs, bothered by clutter, and dirt just plain freaks you out.

d4: Your issues are relatively mild, but you are still constantly cleaning up and attempting to establish order. But something major, like having to walk through a

sewer, might send you over the edge—forcing you to add your Trait die to the Difficulty of all actions for the rest of the scene.

d8: You don't like to shake hands, prefer to open doorknobs with a clean handkerchief, and brush your teeth only after you've poured boiling water on the brush. Your issues with hygiene and neatness interfere with your everyday life. If you are in any unclean environment, you must add your Trait die to the Difficulty of all your actions for the remainder of the scene. If you're dealing with something extremely disgusting, however, you usually fall into a hysterical fit or become otherwise useless.

Nonhealing (d8/d12)

You don't heal naturally. You must be repaired or restored somehow, or injuries simply never go away. There needs to be some logical reason for why this is true for your character. At the d8 level, this only applies to Wound damage; at the d12 level, it applies to both Wound and Stun.

Characters with this Complication should probably also take an Asset such as Unnatural Healing or Constructed; otherwise, they will have no way to recover from injury. In some high-tech or magical settings you might be healed through unusual means, since your body doesn't seem to repair itself.

On the Run (d4/d8/d12)

You're on the lam—running from the law. Which law, and why, is between you and the Game Master. You might not actually be guilty of what you're accused of, but be sure to clarify who will be looking for you, whether there's a publicly known manhunt, or what.

d4: The consequences of being caught include jail time, fines, confiscation of goods, loss of status, or similar—you aren't likely to be injured.

d8: If caught, you might be locked up for life, beaten black and blue by the mob, lose everything you own, or similar. If you're really unlucky, you could be sentenced to death—better hope your buddies can break you out!

d12: You're looking down the wrong end of police sniper rifles. Orders are to kill you on sight, so keep your head down or have it shot off.

Out for Blood (d4/d8)

You don't forgive and forget, but you do reduce and recycle. When something gets on your nerves, you have a tendency to blow a fuse and take things a bit too far in retaliation. This is real bloodlust, unlike the more common Anger Issues Complication (which should almost never be taken in conjunction with this Trait).

d4: Your rage rises only in cases of serious offenses. In combat or other extremely heated situations, you may succumb to frenzy, beating those you don't like into a bloody pulp. You may be howling and foaming, or cold and silent, but either way you don't suffer the enemy to live if you can help it, and you don't give too much thought to tactics. If things are getting to the edge of violence, you must make Average Willpower + Discipline/Concentration roll to restrain yourself, with the Difficulty increased by your Trait die.

d8: You frenzy over even small offenses, regardless of the situation or actual intent. When something bothers you even a little, you must roll to restrain yourself. If you fail, you start a fight. In situations where violence is totally unacceptable or suicidal, your Trait die is not added to the Difficulty.

Overconfident (d4–d10)

You're overconfident. It isn't just a desire to show off—you actually believe you can handle almost anything. This is primarily a Trait for you to role play, but once per situation, the Game Master may add your Trait die to *any* Difficulty or opposing roll, to represent a possibly fatal hesitation at that moment when you realize you just bit off more than you can chew.

Overweight (d2–d6)

Polite people say you're big-boned, but only your mother believes it. Add your Trait die to the Difficulty of all athletic actions or others in which the Game Master believes your extra lard impedes you.

Pacifist (d6/d12)

You abhor violence.

d6: You won't fight. You firmly believe that violence is wrong, defending yourself only as a last resort. If you wind up in a fight you don't believe is absolutely necessary, add your Trait die to the Difficulty of all offensive actions.

d12: You can't fight or engage in violence. It might be a mental compulsion, mystical curse, or part of your programming, but you simply *can't* fight, no matter how badly you need to. This is extremely tricky for a player character in a game, so the Game Master must approve this carefully.

Paralyzed (d8)

You're paralyzed from the waist down, either since birth or as a result of some condition. You can't run, jump, or perform many athletic actions. Given the right circumstances, using a wheelchair permits movement as normal, or a powered wheelchair may increase movement speed, but crawling is half normal speed and prevents you from taking other actions. If you want to try something that is hindered by but not prevented by your inability to use your legs, add your Trait die to the Difficulty.

Paranoid (d4)

You know they're after you. Demons, the I.R.S., your mother-in-law—it's a conspiracy! You trust no one, and make sure never to take your medication, because *they* always put mind-control drugs in it! While this is principally up to you to role play, you may have to add your Trait die to the Difficulty of certain rolls where your paranoia reveals the truth that others wish to hide!

Phobia (d2+)

You have a fear of something common: spiders, cats, werewolves, needles, or the like. Whenever the object of your phobia is present, add your Trait die to the Difficulty of all rolls. The higher the Trait die, the more intense the fear.

Prejudice (d4)

You have a prejudice against a certain group of people, likely based on ideological, religious, political, or ethnic differences. However, because prejudices of many kinds can make people uncomfortable in real life, discuss this Complication with your Game Master and the other players before taking it.

Pyro (d10)

Everything looks better when you set it on fire! Unfortunately, indulging in this can get you in a *lot* of trouble with pretty much anyone, and you may still feel the guilt if someone dies from one of your blazes. This doesn't just mean you like to use fire on your enemies, it's a serious compulsion; you may even spend so much time staring into the flames that they consume you, and you won't mind. It might be difficult to hide, too, since you're thinking and talking about fire pretty much all the time.

Rebellious (d4)

You have serious problems with authority. If possible, you'll find a way to avoid following orders without getting shot—it's all about the attitude. Sometimes this gets you yelled at, sometimes it might get you locked up, or even sentenced to death for mutiny. While this is principally up to you to role play, it will also have repercussions within your command structure, and you may have to add your Trait die to the Difficulty of certain actions, particularly when interacting with your superiors.

Rival (d2+)

There's someone out to get you. Maybe they want you dead, or maybe they just want you discredited, but they'll do whatever it takes. Your Rival is approximately the same power level as you, but the animosity they feel gives them an advantage—whenever acting *directly* against you, they add this Trait's die as a bonus to their roll.

Rotten Luck (d4/d8/d12)

Just when everything is looking up, you can expect it to come crashing down around your ears. The Game Master can compel you to reroll all the dice from an action and use the lower of the two results. Instead of a reroll, though, the Game Master might just decide upon some unfortunate event to befall your character and then throw a few Plot Points at you to ease your pain.

d4: You can be compelled to reroll once per session.

d8: You can be compelled to reroll twice per session.

d12: You can be compelled to reroll thrice per session.

Shy (d6)

You're a wallflower. You become uncomfortable when you are the center of attention. While this is principally up to you to role play, you become so agitated that when your Shyness becomes a problem you must add your Trait die to the Difficulties of all your actions.

Smartass (d4)

You just can't help yourself … if the opportunity is there to crack a joke, especially at someone else's expense, you're going to take it even if it earns you a punch in the breadbasket. While this is principally up to you to role play, you may have to add your Trait die to the Difficulties of rolls to deal with people you've offended.

Stingy (d4–d6)

You never spend money you don't have to. No matter how much you have, you hate seeing money slip out of your possession. While this is primarily a Trait for you to role play, it may cause you to be hard to deal with, you could make people angry, and you might even try to cheat people out of paying them. In situations where this attitude causes problems, add your Trait die to the Difficulty of your rolls.

Strange Luck (d6/d12)

Strange happenings seem to follow you. The used car you just bought is haunted; gremlins bother the plane you're flying on; it rains frogs on your town. Once per session, something bizarre and inexplicable plagues you.

d6: At this level, the happenings are weird, but not directly dangerous. However, they do cause problems. For example, they might get you noticed while you're trying to be stealthy, make you lose so much sleep you become fatigued, or scare off your date.

d12: Things aren't just weird—they're downright scary. Poltergeists try to injure you with falling bricks; a werewolf just happens to attack the bus you're on; someone else's spell misfires and risks blowing you up. The events shouldn't be instantly lethal, but do risk damage if the character isn't careful or lucky when they do occur.

Superstitious (d2/d6)

You actually *believe* that?

d2: You behave oddly—avoid stepping on cracks, talk about how breaking a mirror is seven years of bad luck, and so on. It doesn't interfere with your actions most of the time, but sometimes it makes people feel awkward around you—they are less likely to take you seriously, enjoy your company, or want to spend time with you.

d6: You believe so firmly that your superstitions interfere with your everyday life. If you perceive a negative omen, you must add your Trait die to the Difficulty of all your actions for the remainder of the scene, or until the omen is negated by another superstition. There may also be other consequences, if you perceive specific instructions in the omens you see.

Toes the Line (d4)

You do it by the book, no matter what. You won't break regulations, you always obey your superiors, and you follow instructions to the letter. This causes all sorts of havoc. While principally up to you to role play, you may have to add your Trait die to the Difficulties of rolls to get people to do things your way if they think your way sucks.

Traumatic Flashes (d4/d8)

Something terrible happened to you that has left you mentally scarred, and now certain triggers will set you off whether you like it or not. You probably have recurring nightmares, but some things will reduce you to a hysterical, sobbing mess for at least 5 or 10 minutes. As a d4 Trait, the trigger is somewhat specific and usually you will only have an "episode" once per game session. As a d8 Trait, the triggers are more general and happen on an average of twice per game session. The specific details of how this Trait manifests and what happened to your character are up to you and the Game Master.

Ugly (d2–d6)

You're unattractive, plain and simple. Add your Trait die to the Difficulty of any action where being physically unappealing makes life harder. Most characters should not possess both Ugly and Eerie Presence, since their effects overlap significantly.

Unstable (d4+)

Something isn't quite right in your head. It might be that you're actually insane, but then it could also be a result of stress, drugs, or other problems. This could affect you in several different ways, so discuss the specifics of what you have in mind with your Game Master. Possibilities include regular hallucinations, the blurring of reality and a fantasy life, or the inability to perceive the world in the way that others do (a simple use of the Trait die to penalize rolls to communicate with or influence others). However, any sort of instability like this will likely be off-putting to most people, and is usually taken as a social stigma of some kind, making public life much more difficult when it becomes known.

Weak Stomach (d2–d6)

You can't stand the sight of blood—your own, or anybody else's. You become ill, feel nauseous, or faint. When in the presence of blood, gore, or injury more serious than a paper-cut, add your Trait die to the Difficulty of all physical actions.

Bundles

Most of the game information presented in these rules is based on an average human standard, but allows you to use Attributes and Traits to custom build a character that goes far beyond or below those ideas. Many settings, however, might offer character options that come as "package deals." An elf in a fantasy setting, for example, is generally attractive and long-lived (among other things). A vampire drinks blood but it can be harmed by direct sunlight. We call these package deals Bundles.

Bundles are collections of Traits—both Assets and Complications—under a single name. Like Traits, they have a die-type value as their cost, but that value has an unusual range: it not only includes d2+ (everything d2 and above), but also d0 (zero-point cost), and negative dice (–d2, –d4, –d6, etc).

Bundles can include any number of Assets and Complications, though the Game Master must approve all the Traits selected and their levels.

Bundles have a Trait Point cost equal to the total of all the Traits in them. A Bundle with three Assets of values d12, d6, and d6, and two Complications of values d8 and d10, will cost 12 + 6 + 6 – 8 – 10 = 6, or the same as a d6 Asset.

Negative Bundles count toward the limited number of Trait Points gained from Complications, though the individual Complications within the Bundles do not. For example, a single negative Bundle could have an overall value of –d10, containing four Complications at d10 and three Assets at d10. While it includes 40 Points of Complications, it only counts as 10 of the 30 allowed Trait Points gained from Complications.

Traits within the Bundle are treated exactly the same as all other Traits, and can be increased, decreased, added, or removed through play as much as is sensible based upon the situation and the reason behind the Bundle. Entire Bundles could be gained or lost during play, if it makes sense.

Bundles aren't meant to allow players to make extremely powerful characters and "break" the game; they exist to make it easier to build and keep track of special or unusual characters. They let you lump together a group of Traits to describe more complex conditions and natures than an individual Trait can cover. Below are some example Bundles, with brief descriptions of why their Traits were chosen. However, these are only a few possibilities. What Bundles are available will change from setting to setting, and two Bundles with the same name might not always have the same Traits!

Players should feel free to compose their own Bundles or variant Bundles; Game Masters might also choose to design a few to suit the game they want to run. Game Masters have to approve any Bundles and their contents, though, in order to prevent characters from having so many Assets and Complications, or such strange combinations of Traits, that they become difficult to play (or to play with). There needs to be a guiding rationale behind the creation of a Bundle. If it's just about making your character "work" with a general concept, you need to just use the regular rules for individual Traits.

Sample Bundles

The following are just the tip of the Bundle iceberg. When you design a Bundle, list the Asset or Complication with its individual cost and a short explanation of why this is part of the concept. Do the math and come up with the final cost. Some Bundles "zero out" and don't have a net gain or cost in Trait points, while others can be treated either as an Asset or Complication. You should also provide enough description to understand the role that the bundle holds in the setting or storyline.

Abductee (–d6)

Enhanced Communication/Manipulation/Movement/Senses (d4—Pick One) The abduction experience left this person changed, with some enhanced ability they did not before possess.

Contacts (d2) The trauma of the abduction led to an increased need for some kind of support system, be it family or friends known only online.

Amesia (d4) The abductee cannot remember much about the actual terrifying experience nor much about the abductors.

Paranoid (d4) Trust is a problem for abductees, and they are always convinced that "they" will return.

Traumatic Flashes (d4) The abductee is plagued by nightmares, and certain visual or emotional triggers will reduce him to a fit of hysterics as he mentally relives part of his experience.

This character is a victim of an abduction experience. He cannot remember exactly what happened, only bits and pieces, and only can pull out the sketchiest details about those who took him away. After some period of time he was returned home, but scarred both physically and emotionally. He can never remember exactly what happened or understand why, but he can never quite forget it, either.

Notes: The exact nature of the adbuction is up to the player and Game Master (though the player might end up completely in the dark as to what the Game Master really has in mind). It could be aliens, time travelers from the future, or beings from another dimension. By simply changing the background information it could represent a different kind of experience in a fantasy setting.

Android/Robot (d0)

Attuned to Technology (d8) As an artificial life form, it understands machines and how they work.

Constructed (d8) It was made, not born, and can be put back together.

Hardy Constitution (d6) It is not usually affected by chemicals, toxins, and poisons.

Photographic Memory (d8) It has a mind like a machine.

Dead Inside (d6) With a computer for a brain, it does not feel emotions like a normal human being.

Eerie Presence (d4) Some people react badly to it, finding its artificial nature unnerving.

Memorable (d8) Its nature and unusual appearance makes it easy to recall compared to most other folk.

Nonhealing (d12) It must be repaired, as it cannot heal on its own.

This form of highly, advanced artificial life is still quite rare—possibly even a unique prototype, alien artifact, or advanced being transported back in time. It can do all the tasks of a normal human being, and some even better, but has difficulty understanding human emotions or relating to others socially.

A computer-based life form like this may work to evolve itself to be more like humans or it may simply live to serve its intended purpose and programming. Some may dislike or react badly to it, while others will be fascinated by something that's so close to human yet also so far.

Notes: The final form could either be quite human (android) or built more for a specific purpose (robot). Depending on its specific role in the setting and story, this bundle can be modified, and the Game Master is encouraged to allow superior Strength and Intelligence as long as it is balanced in other (with either lower Atrributes or Complications). It could also be modified to represent other types of constructed life in a fantasy or modern setting.

Beastman (d4)

Animal Empathy (d4) Part animal, beastmen have natural instincts that help them when dealing with other natural creatures.

Danger Sense (d4) Their heightened senses give beastmen an increased ability to react to a surprising situation.

Enhanced Senses (d2) A finely tuned sense of smell allows a beastman to detect scents that are invisible to the normal human nose.

Inherent Weapons (d2) Be it tooth or claw, the beastman is never completely unarmed.

Tough (d4) A beastman is a creature born to carve its place in the natural world among fierce predators, making it able to take more punishment than anyone might guess.

Anger Issues (d2) The savage world of the beastman leaves him little tolerance for threats, violence, or jokes at his expense.

Crude (d4) The beastman communicates in a more simple, direct way than is acceptable in polite society.

Ugly (d4) By human standards, the bestial beastman is furry and unattractive.

Beastmen appear to be a crossbreed between man and animal. They are more muscular and possess bestial features, clawed hands, etc. Their culture is more primitive than the human norm, and has a dominance-based culture where each member must prove his place in the overall social order.

The beastman is never completely comfortable in civilization, and feels most at home under open sky and in fresh air. They are quick to anger, find violence an acceptable solution to most problems, and see the world in more simple terms than most other races.

Notes: While this is a "generic" beastman, it can be made to represent specific affinity to a particular animal (wolf, feline, ape, etc.) with just a change in description. It can be further customized to represent qualities associated with that animal type (faster speed, for example). For a science-fiction setting, it can be used as an alien race that is sophisticated in technology but more primal in culture.

Elf (d4)

Allure (d4) Elves possess an ethereal beauty that enchants most other races.

Attuned to Nature (d2) Most at home in their woodland homes, elves have an affinity with the natural world.

Enhanced Senses (d2) Elves can see in near-darkness as well as they can in the bright of day.

Longevity (d4) An elf will generally live to be nearly 200 years old before old age sets in.

Fragile (d4) Fine-boned and more delicate than a human, elves are more easily damaged.

Prejudice (d4) Elves are raised to distrust and dislike non-elves and outsiders.

Kin to feyfolk and in harmony with nature, elves are a reclusive people who live in quiet isolation from the rest of the world. They cherish life and beauty, but will defend their own and their homes fiercely.

Human lives seem to move at a frantic pace to the more patient and long-lived elves. Elves have an intuition to nature that seems spooky and supernatural to non-elves, but is part of their way of life.

Notes**:** This version of the elf is meant to reflect its most known portrayal in fantasy literature. Customize it to reflect a specific interpretation of elves in a particular setting. Some elves might be talented with sword or bow, or have an affinity for magic, for example.

Saurian (d0)

Fast Healer (d6) Saurians recover from damage and can regenerate small appendages (such as fingers and toes).

Inherent Armor (d2) A tough, scaly hide provides protection for the saurian.

Steady Calm (d2) It is unnerving to a human how still and quiet a saurian can be for extended periods of time.

Lightning Reflexes (d2) Just as surprising is how a saurian can instantly spring to action or react to danger.

Complex Needs (d2) Saurians cannot stomach foods other than flesh from an animal dead less than one hour, or preferably, food that is still alive when they begin to feast.

Dead Inside (d4) With a more reptile brain, saurians simply cannot understand or relate to mammalian feelings and emotions.

Eerie Presence (d6) A saurian's reptilian appearance and unblinking eyes are unsettling to most humans who are not used to them.

Saurians hail from a planet in the galaxy where dinosaur-like creatures evolved into a humanoid form. They appear somewhat lizard-like, with vaguely iguana-like heads, but they are warm-blooded and intellectually equal to humans. They do not possess sophisticated emotions, so are either intellectual or primal in their dealings.

Note: These can be modified to act as lizard-men in fantasy settings or could be altered to become a more monstrous being for a horror story.

Vampire (d6)

Enhanced Senses (d6) A vampire can see even in total darkness.

Inherent Weapons (d4) A vampire can manifest claws and fangs to defend himself or subdue a victim.

Longevity (d12) A vampire is effectively immortal, provided he is not killed and has a sufficient blood supply to feed on.

Simple Needs (d12) A vampire does not eat, breath, or drink—save for a small amount of blood.

Unnatural Healing (d12) Vampires can consume blood to heal themselves, if they can find prey.

Allergy (d8) Burned by direct sunlight, a vampire suffers 1 point of Wound damage every turn.

Duty (d8) A vampire cannot enter a house uninvited.

Duty (d12) A vampire is a creature of the night, and must sleep during the day.

Nonhealing (d12) Undead flesh doesn't heal naturally, requiring fresh blood to regenerate its wounds.

Feared by the mortal folk who actually know of their true existence, vampires are creatures forced to feed on the blood of the living to survive. While they can survive on a nonhuman or preserved substitute, it pales in comparison to the taste and surging power of living blood. They must sleep by day, and direct sunlight will damage or destroy them.

They always remember being human, but the powers and immortality of a vampire forever change them—along with the hungry beast that dwells within them always craving a fresh kill. Whether they give into the beast or fight to retain control is up to the individual vampire.

Notes: This is a pop-culture amalgamation of the vampire as seen in novels, movies, and television. A Game Master should modify it as needed to match the particular vampire lore or fiction he's trying to replicate.

Skills

We know that you're strong, dumb, quick on your feet, and blissfully unaware of most of your surroundings. We also know that you're an honest, loyal guy who's really tough and reacts quickly to danger. But what can you do? Do you know how to use a sword or are you a hunter? Can you track an enemy through the forest? Are you effective at leading others? Skills are the game's tool to answer these questions.

Attributes provide a means of rating your character's basic capabilities, Traits make you different, unusual, or unexpected. Your learning, practice, and training, however, are all represented by your Skills. A character's Skills reveal a lot: profession, hobbies, background, or upbringing. Paired with Attributes, and potentially modified by Traits, they form the core dynamic of action resolution in the game.

Using Skills

Skills are grouped into two related types. General Skills represent broad bases of knowledge or training. Athletics, a General Skill, can be used for anything from running to swimming to dodging an attack. General Skill can only be improved to a maximum of d6, however. After that, Specialties take over.

Specialties

Once a General Skill rises to d6, you may purchase one or more Specialties. Specialties focus on a particular aspect of a General Skill, allowing you to use a die greater than a d6—but only within that field. For example, a character with Athletics d6 might have a Specialty in Running and thus use a d10 when undertaking actions involving that aspect of athletic endeavor. Specialties start at d8 and may then be improved normally during character generation or with Advancement Points,

just like Attributes. There is no limit to the number of Specialties you can have under a given General Skill other than your character creation budget or available Advancement Points.

If a roll calls for a Specialty that you don't have, roll the General Skill die. If even that is missing, the Attribute is rolled by itself, except in special cases—some Skilled actions, marked [Skilled Use Only] can't be taken unless you have at least a d2 in them. Your Game Master always has the option of allowing you to spend a Plot Point to attempt it, but you would have to work hard to justify it.

Specialties may fall under more than one General Skill. For example, a dancer could train the Dancing Specialty under Athletics if they compete professionally, or under Perform if they are practicing for a ballet performance. Once you choose to train a Specialty under a certain General Skill, it can't be moved to another, and you can't take the same specialty more than once. If you have a Specialty under one General Skill but no die rating in another General Skill that also offers that Specialty, you can't use your Specialty to default to the other General Skill.

New Specialties

Because Specialties have such a narrow focus, it would be impossible to list all possible Specialties under each General Skill. The lists in this chapter are suggestions covering the most common Specialties. They should not be considered a complete listing. It is even possible that your Game Master may wish to remove some, making them unavailable under a certain General Skill, or simply nonexistent. If you want a Specialty not listed, or want to place it under a different General Skill be sure to clear it with your Game Master first.

Benchmarks of Proficiency

To give you an idea of how well trained your character is, and what they might be capable of in general, see the Skill Level Table (Table 3.3). It lists each die type, and gives an appraisal of Skills rated at that level.

Skill Descriptions

Each description lists the General Skill's name (along with a note if it can't be used untrained), sample Specialties, and several examples of actions with that Skill that would take an Average Difficulty roll to beat.

Animals

This Skill covers the training, care, breeding, or raising of animals of all kinds. Depending on the campaign, this Skill may extend to some very strange or bizarre creatures.

Specialties: Animal Care, Animal Training, Riding, Veterinary Medicine, Zoology.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Teach domesticated animals to perform moderately difficult tricks; herd cattle; ride through a forest during the day; identify a basilisk lair by the distinctive, lifelike statuary garden surrounding it.

Artistry

Artistry is the Skill that covers artistic expression with media, from writing fiction to sculpting marble statues. It does not cover singing, dancing, or acting, which are all grouped under Performance, though it does include composing music and choreographing a dance recital.

Specialties: Appraisal, Cooking, Composition, Forgery, Painting, Photography, Poetry, Sculpture, Writing.

Table 3.3: Skill Level

Die Type	Proficiency	Comment (based on Melee Weapons and Sword Specialty)
None (d0)	Untrained	You shouldn't be playing with sharp objects.
d2	Incompetent	You've watched knights drill in the courtyard in front of the castle.
d4	Novice	Your father taught you how to defend yourself with the sword.
d6	Competent	You can hold your own in a fight, and with a number of weapons.
d8	Professional	You can hold off multiple opponents and still win the day.
d10	Expert	You have few equals in your region, and are highly regarded.
d12	Master	Other warriors look to your skill and experience to inspire them.
d12+	Supreme	You are a peerless paragon of the blade.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Cook dinner for a family and guests; write a polite thank-you note; draw a fairly accurate pencil sketch of a subject.

Athletics

Working out, staying in shape, and moving out of harm's way usually all involve Athletics. Physical coordination, distance running, and other major activities make frequent use of this Skill.

Specialties: Climbing, Contortion, Dodge, Juggling, Jumping, Gymnastics, Parachuting, Riding, Running, Sports (choose one), Swimming, Weight Lifting.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Run a mile for a fitness test; play a pick-up game of basketball with some friends; throw yourself to the ground when being shot at by armed offenders; climb a tree with handy low branches; swim across a still, small pond.

Covert

Covert covers both physical and mental expressions of deception, whether in a criminal sense or as a means of evading and overcoming obstacles.

Specialties: Camouflage, Disguise, Forgery, Pickpocketing, Sabotage, Safecracking, Stealth, Streetwise.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Open the lock on a suitcase or piece of luggage; pickpocket a drunk; sneak past a campus safety officer; cut the brake line on a parked car with no one around.

Craft

Craft is the application of a trade toward the creation of something useful. It differs from Artistry in that the result of a Craft action is something of utility rather than artistic expression, although there are several occasions where the two may overlap.

Specialties: Architecture, Brewing, Carpentry, Cooking, Leatherworking, Metalworking, Pottery, Sewing.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Sew a new pair of pants; repair the broken leg on a chair; sculpt a crude bowl out of clay; build a child's tree house.

Discipline

This Skill is used to resist temptation, torture, and fear—and possibly to scare others in the manner you've been taught to resist. By yelling or coaxing, you can try to keep others on a focused path.

Specialties: Concentration, Interrogation, Intimidation, Leadership, Morale, Resistance.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Keep the newbies in line during a briefing; memorize jargon for a test tomorrow; resist spilling the beans when confronted with the good cop/bad cop routine.

Drive

With this Skill, you know how to use ground transport, ranging from motorcycles and sedans to trucks and construction vehicles. Most routine uses by casual drivers do not require this skill, and are not usually rolled at all. If you spend a lot of time behind the wheel, however, you will have this Skill. In a campaign without modern conveniences like cars, this Skill may be replaced by something like Ride, and thus separate out the riding of animals from the Animals Skill.

Specialties: Boat (choose general type), Bus, Car, Motorcycle. Sedan, Tractor, Truck.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Maneuver at moderately high speeds; navigate difficult terrain; examine a vehicle for combat damage.

Guns

You are proficient with personal firearms, from pistols to sniper rifles. This Skill includes not only the use of guns to shoot others, but related training—gun maintenance, for instance, is a necessity when your life depends on the bullet leaving the chamber. This Skill does not usually include the use of large, vehicle-mounted weapons or indirect fire weapons; Heavy Weapons is the appropriate Skill in those cases.

Specialties: Assault Rifle, Energy Weapon, Flamethrower, Machine Gun, Pistol, Repair, Rifle, Shotgun, Sniper Rifle.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Clear a jammed weapon; hit a small, stationary target at point blank range; hit a man-sized target on the practice field at close range; identify the basic type of a weapon; determine the right ammunition from among several similar varieties.

Heavy Weapons (Skilled Use Only)

This Skill covers large-scale weaponry from mortars and field artillery such as cannon

to vehicle-mounted railguns and rocket launchers. If you have this Skill, you also know how to conduct indirect fire and engage in forward observer actions. Most weapons covered by this Skill are at least Large Scale if not larger.

Specialties: Bombards, Demolitions, Forward Observation, Grenade Launchers, Mortars, Rail Guns, Repair, Rocket Launchers, Siege Engines.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Hit a slow-moving transport; properly demolish a building; relay the targeting data for hitting a very large building with an artillery shell on a day with no wind.

Influence

Influence lets you win friends, lie to enemies, and persuade potential allies to join your cause. This can be especially important in a political situation, where the right words can escalate or diffuse a problem in moments. This Skill also helps when your opponent has all the guns, or when you need to deal with social bureaucracy.

Specialties: Administration, Barter, Bureaucracy, Conversation, Interrogation, Intimidation, Leadership, Persuasion, Politics, Seduction.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Deal with daily paperwork; negotiate an exchange of goods with a willing merchant; seduce someone who already finds you attractive; mingle well at a fancy party.

Knowledge

This Skill covers a wide base of general knowledge. It is almost entirely academic in nature, which means that while you may know the theory behind many other Skills, you can't simply default to this Skill when actually attempting something practical. Depending on the campaign setting, Knowledge may be broken out into other, narrower Skills, such as Law, Occult, Folklore, Politics, and so forth. Many settings don't concern themselves with the finer details, however, so a Specialty will usually suffice.

Specialties: Appraisal, Culture, Folklore, History, Law, Literature, Philosophy, Politics, Religion, Sports.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Remember the names of all the players on a champion football team; name the major exports of the U.S. and Great Britain; and figure out where an ancient manuscript comes from.

Mechanic (Skilled Use Only)

This Skill might let you build an engine from scratch, redesign a machine, or perform other feats involving mechanical devices. Mechanic differs from Tech in that it doesn't concern itself with electronics, computers, and related devices.

Specialties: Automobile Repairs, Construction, Customization, Jury-Rigging, Mechanical Repairs, Plumbing.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Repair damaged plumbing; operate complex machinery and equipment; disable or repair relatively simple gadgets and devices; change the oil and check the tires.

Medicine (Skilled Use Only)

You have the training required to patch people back together, treat disease, or work in a medical lab. You might not be a doctor, officially, but you're quite capable of stepping in to help others. With a d6 level in this Skill, you are most likely licensed to practice medicine (or the equivalent in your setting), while further Specialties allow for specialist practitioners.

Specialties: Dentistry, First Aid, Forensics, General Practice, Genetics, Internal Medicine, Neurology, Pharmaceuticals, Physiology, Psychiatry, Rehabilitation, Surgery, Toxicology, Veterinary Medicine.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Diagnose a cold or disease properly; prescribe the correct dosage of common medicines; administer first aid for a common poison.

Melee Weapons

This Skill provides basic proficiency with knives, clubs, swords, and anything else you can swing, poke, or bludgeon with in a fight. Specialists are known for their martial talents, and can impress or intimidate their foes before they even land the first blow.

Specialties: Chains, Clubs, Intimidation, Knives, Pole Arms, Repair, Shields, Swords, Whips.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Twirl a knife impressively; deflect a slow thrust; make a simple club; sharpen a blade. Note that deflecting an attack is an opposed roll—however, a "slow attack" might be about a 7, especially in a training exercise where it isn't really be an attack at all.

Perception

This Skill lets you notice someone sneaking around, find a hidden clue, or spot the "tell" when your opponent is bluffing. It's especially important in investigative or action-oriented campaign settings. If you have a professional rating in this Skill, your senses have been honed to a significant level, although Specialties reflect that even the most astute individual must focus his talents somewhere.

Specialties: Deduction, Empathy, Gambling, Hearing, Intuition, Investigation, Read Lips, Search, Sight, Smell/Taste, Tactics, Tracking.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Gather basic forensic evidence; spot movement in light undergrowth; determine that the three men in gray suits and shades standing by the door are a potential threat.

Performance

Dancing, singing, acting, playing an instrument, and other forms of physical expression are covered by this Skill. It's also what you use to tell a convincing lie, which can go a long way toward getting you out of a tight spot. Performance does not cover the composition or planning of performances, which is part of Artistry, although there is some degree of overlap (Improvisation, for instance, is all Performance.)

Specialties: Acting, Dancing, Costuming, Impersonation, Instrument (pick one), Oratory, Singing, Sleight of Hand, Stage Magic.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Act in amateur productions; play lead guitar in a local band; mask surface emotions; place among the finalists in a minor dance competition.

Pilot (Skilled Use Only)

If you have this Skill you understand how to control aircraft under adverse conditions and deal with small problems. Serious mechanical trouble requires Mechanic, and using the weapons mounted on an aircraft requires Heavy Weapons.

Specialties: Commercial Airliner, Gunship, Gyrocopter, Helicopter, Hovercraft, Jet Fighter, Single-Prop Airplane, Zeppelin.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Fly through mild turbulence; land or takeoff quickly; refuel a large craft.

Ranged Weapons

This Skill covers the use of hurled or physically propelled weapons such as throwing axes, slings, spears, and bows. It does not include guns, which have their own Skill. In some campaign settings, this Skill may be divided into Archery (for bows, crossbows, and slings) and Thrown Weapons (for spears, axes, knives, and darts).

Specialties: Blowguns, Bolos, Bows, Crossbows, Darts, Grenades, Javelin, Repair, Slings, Throwing Knives.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Hit a man-sized, stationary target across the room; replace a bow string; locate a good-sized throwing rock in the field.

Science (Skilled Use Only)

You possess advanced scientific knowledge and understand complex processes and concepts. Chemists, physicists, and botanists, among many others, use this Skill. Specialties are usually broad categories of study, though taking a narrower field should translate to a deeper understanding of the field. For application of computer science and physics, you are more likely to want the Tech Skill. If the campaign setting features magic or supernatural elements, those would likely fall under a Lore or Occult Skill.

Specialties: Earth Sciences, Environmental Sciences, Space Sciences, Life Sciences, Math, Physical Sciences.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Operate most laboratory equipment; translate scientific jargon into everyday prose; remember Newton's Laws.

Survival

With this Skill, you can find food, water, shelter, and your way around when civilization isn't available. You can even stay alive in the face of extremes of weather or when hindered by minor injuries.

Specialties: Camouflage, Find Shelter, First Aid, Foraging, Outdoor Life, Specific Environment, Tracking, Trapping, Woodcraft.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Hunt or trap small game; identify the signs of habitation, animals, or events; perform first aid on cuts or broken bones.

Tech (Skilled Use Only)

Complicated electronics, computer systems, and programming are all within your area of expertise if you have a rating in this Skill. You're able to hack through a database, rewire a security system, create a computer network, or even work on electronic sentience. This Skill assumes that the training you have received scales appropriately with the level of technology in your

game's setting; if you are exposed to more advanced technology, such as that used by aliens or time travelers, the corresponding Difficulty will be higher.

Specialties: Communications Systems, Computer Programming, Create Technical Devices, Electronics, Hacking, Jury-Rigging, Repair Electrical Systems.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Operate most advanced computer equipment; override standard directive protocols and basic computer security; write a simple program; repair moderate system damage; disable a cheap home security alarm.

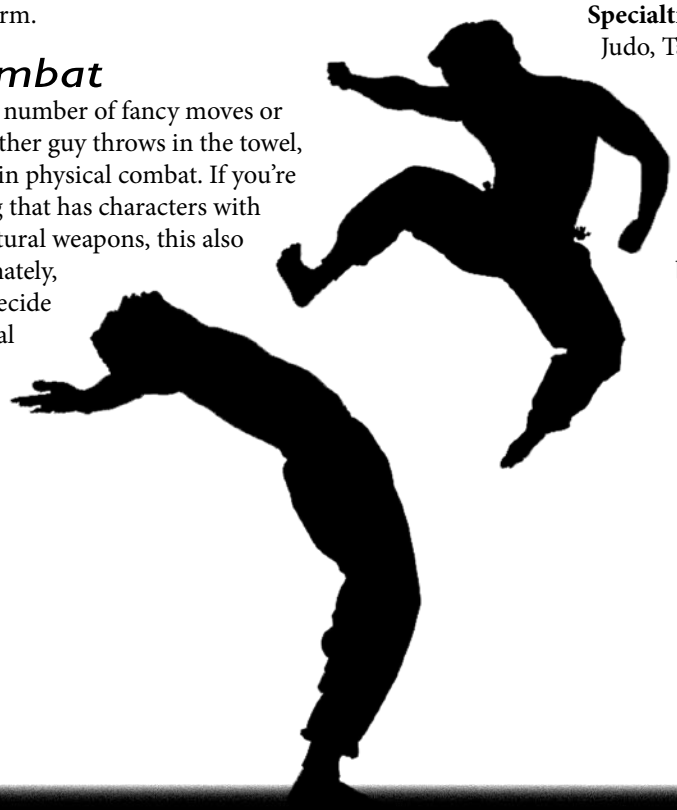
Unarmed Combat

Whether you know a number of fancy moves or just slog ahead until the other guy throws in the towel, this Skill reflects training in physical combat. If you're in the sort of game setting that has characters with claws, teeth, and other natural weapons, this also covers those Traits. Alternately, your Game Master may decide to assign those to a Natural Weapons Skill.

Specialties represent different styles of combat. They're used the same way most of the time, but your Game Master may wish to differentiate between different martial styles, and whether the attack uses Strength or Agility as the appropriate Attribute. This Skill doesn't cover the use of hand held weapons such as swords or clubs; for these, use Melee Weapons. Unarmed combat always does Stun damage unless you have the Brawler Trait, although you can use a called shot to a vital area to change it to Basic (see Called Shots, page 92).

Specialties: Boxing, Brawling, Clawing, Judo, Tae Kwan Do, Wrestling.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Identify a specific style of martial arts; secure prize money in a small-time contest that is not played out in detail; break a board with your hand.



Adapting Skills

The main skill list will be fine for many campaigns, especially those that reflect something very much like the modern world. It can and should be adjusted for the needs of a particular game setting or storyline. For example, in a world in which an understanding of folklore and legends might be crucial to survival, a new General skill called "Lore" might be split from Knowledge (which would cover only mundane information). Lore could have any number of specialties (ghosts, UFOs, etc.).

Another example might be a setting or story in which navigating across (or even under) the water is very important. Remove the "Boat" specialty skill from Drive and introduce a new general skill such as "Watercraft."

Watercraft

This Skill covers the use of all forms of waterborne or aquatic transport. Depending on the campaign setting, this may be folded in with Drive to create a single Planetcraft Skill, or even with Pilot; in most cases, however, these vehicles are sufficiently different from automobiles and airplanes that a separate Skill is required.

Specialties: Canoe, Rowboat, Powerboat, Yacht, Tanker, Submarine, Sailboat.

An Average Difficulty task might include: Plotting a course from charts, estimating the length of a voyage, navigating hazardous shallows at slow speeds, canoeing through small rapids.

CHAPTER 4
GEAR

At this point you might have a character ready, but you're gonna need stuff. Be it weapons, armor, clothing, gadgets, or adventuring supplies, it's the rare character that walks into a situation completely naked and unprepared.

Epictetus, the Greek Stoic philosopher, has the right of it when he said *"Know, first, who you are; and then adorn yourself accordingly,"* though it's safe to say he probably wasn't speaking of character generation for a role playing game when he said it. Equipping a character is usually the last step before before getting down to the fun of actual play—but you need an idea of who your character is and what he might be carrying before he battles evil or finds riches.

In any given setting there are hundreds of items, tools, and knick-knacks that a character might, could, or needs to possess in order to practice his chosen profession or just kick a little ass. When you expand the possibilities of equipping a character from any and every genre, setting, and world a Game Master might conceive, such a listing would easily stretch into thousands or tens of thousands of items.

Game Economics

Okay, here's the deal … there's no economic system in this book.

You may be asking yourself, "What? Why the heck not?" The answer is pretty simple, actually. There's no economic system simply because it's problematic to provide such a system for a book that spans all known iterations of space and time—plus whatever a Game Master might come up with. The price of items, services, and equipment depends entirely upon the setting of your game. A game set just before the Great War of 1914 might list a brand new four-seat automobile around $500, yet the same basic type of transportation in a game set at the turn of the 21st century might easily cost more than $20,000.

Remember: Basic wealth, being rich or being poor, is covered under the applicable Traits. Most of the time you'll know if something falls in your sphere of affluence by simply applying a healthy dose of common sense (and asking your Game Master).

And then there's the matter of currency type and value. The United States dollar of 1907 has a different value than it does in 2007. Settings of a fantasy nature often use gold coins, while a setting in Colonial America uses the British currency of the period (pounds, shillings, and pence), and while a game set on the steppes of Russia during the 12th century might use some currency, it would likely be more of a barter and trade system.

The need for specific prices and purchase ability depends on the setting and the individual Game Master. Many stories can get by without endless pages of item and price lists, and just depend on the situation and the assumed wealth of the characters involved. It would be tedious to worry about a modern character's change in net worth every time he buys a pack of gum and bottle of water at a local gas station.

When a Game Master adapts a setting for use in a particular campaign or storyline, he should think through economics at least in general terms and decide what types of items are rare, expensive, or commonplace.

Equipment

In the following pages you'll find various bits of gear, clothing, armor, and weapons of a general nature and description. Many of them will fit in all kinds of settings, but these lists are simply a building block for the creation of more detailed equipment listings related to a spacific setting and campaign.

Equipping a Character

When you're ready to equip your character, discuss with your Game Master exactly how he'll be handling things for his campaign. It could be that he has a specific storyline in mind that limits you or gives you very specific equipment. (One campaign could begin with the player characters as prisoners making their escape, while another might be an all-military campaign where the player characters have access only to government-issued weapons and supplies.) Game Masters and players should keep in mind that characters should have access to or possess what it makes sense for them to have. Pulp-era barbarian heroes need a good loincloth, a sword, and maybe a helmet. A monster-hunting, Chicago police detective needs a decent suit of clothes, his badge, identification, cell phone, laptop, a car, a handgun, and some odd assortment of mystical or practical doodads that helps him fight crime and battle the shadow-minions. A far-future spaceship crewman on a five-year mission needs his space-tights (avoid the red ones, mind you), his communications device, a compu-pad, and an energy pistol. In short, it always comes down to one question, "Does it make sense that my character has this?"

Handing out equipment should basically be done one of four ways.

You get a list from your Game Master of what equipment is available for purchase and how much you're allowed to spend to make purchases. This is typical for many role playing games, and while there's nothing wrong with approaching it this way, it can take time and can drag everyone away from the game itself.

You get a list of your character's starting gear, armor, and weapons. Then you request a few add-ons and negotiate it with the Game Master. This works a lot better then you might imagine, as the person who designs the adventure has a pretty good idea of what your character needs during the game. When gear and equipment are allocated to a character by an organization, such as in military or spy-themed games, this is one of the best ways to handle it. After all, an agent with a license to kill doesn't go down to the lab and pick his gadgets, he's given them based upon the anticipated needs of the mission he's about to go on.

The game master might ask for a "wish list" for him to read through for the opportunity to veto items that aren't appropriate. Others might supply you with starting money and give you a list of available gear along with their prices. Just don't expect to get all the riches, firepower, or Italian sports cars without earning them first. Still others don't bother writing down any equipment at all and assume your character has things as you play—within the realm of common sense, of course. It's safe to assume that a detective has a watch or a pair of handcuffs, for instance, but he probably doesn't have a 20-foot USB cable on him.

Starting Wealth

There are three tiers of starting character: Novice, Veteran, and Elite. Novice is the least experienced type of starting character, while Elite is the most experienced. As Veterans and Elites have already been adventuring for a while, it's safe to assume that they have access to more resources and gear. The Game Master decides on a basic number that reflects how much Standard Wealth a starting Novice has. Table 4.1 shows how resources might be allocated to starting characters.

So, in his modern setting, Game Master Doug might decide that Novice characters have a standard wealth of $2,000. When Deb, Troy, Donna, and Vince go to buy their character's equipment, Game Master Doug hands them a piece of paper with the following amounts/heroic level based on the *Starting Funds* table 4.1.

Starting Experience	Standard Wealth	Wealthy Trait	Dead Broke Trait
Novice	2,000	3,000	1,000
Veteran	4,000	6,000	2,000
Elite	8,000	12,000	4,000

If Game Master Rob is preparing his low-magic fantasy game, he might set up the following chart for his players to figure out what their starting character funds in gold marks (the currency in his game) would be.

Starting Experience	Standard Wealth	Wealthy Trait	Dead Broke Trait
Novice	350	525	175
Veteran	700	1,050	350
Elite	1,400	2,100	700

Availability

Just because your character wants a piece of gear or equipment, that doesn't mean that it's actually available. There are several reasons why something could be hard or even impossible to get.

The first one is the most obvious; an item might not fit within the genre. Since he's playing a dwarven healer in a fantasy setting, Paulie will not find modern handguns, PDAs, or automobiles on the equipment list. This kind of restriction might be introduced into an existing campaign, especially if time-travel, world-hopping, or genre/setting changes occur. For instance, Debbie's character Maria will have no luck finding 9 mm bullets for her Beretta now that she's been transported back in time to the 1893 Chicago Exposition. (To make things worse, the 21st century clothes she's wearing make her stand out considerably in the 19th century!)

An item might be difficult to get due to low supply. In a setting involving a band of young high school and college-aged students from the 1980s trying to find shelter and survive in the Rocky Mountains (and eventually fight back) after soldiers of Communist Russia

Table 4.1: Starting Funds

Starting Experience	Standard Wealth	Wealthy Trait	Dead Broke Trait
Novice	(Base)	1 ½ x Base	½ x Base
Veteran	2 x Base	3 x Base	Base
Hero	4 x Base	6 x Base	2 x Base

invade the country, what they can get becomes a lot more difficult—and dangerous. Imagine the difficulty in getting gasoline, bullets, and food in such a setting.

An item might be illegal to possess, increasing the danger factor of trying to get one. In a modern-America setting, owning a firearm requires the possession of a license. Even then, carrying it in public is still only possible under special circumstances or with special permission. Even body armor, something that's completely defensive, requires a license or permit.

When it comes down to it, it's up to your Game Master to decide if something is available for purchase, requisition, or barter. He may decide to simply hand-wave the acquisition: "Okay, your character met with Jimmy the Fink and managed to get his hands on a handgun. Of course, you have no idea as to how hot the gun is, but seeing as you're an ex-con, you'll get nailed to the wall if the police find it on you anyways. What does your character want to do next?"

A Game Master might also decide that the acquisition of something might be worthy of an adventure—or at least a few scenes—in and of itself. This is often a major part of campaigning and adventuring, whether it's looking for a lost artifact, such as a lance that aids in the slaying of dragons or finding a tablet with directions on how to get back home through the interstellar gateway. As they say, the point of the adventure is not "getting to the end" but the journey along the way.

General Gear

This category includes your character's basic equipment: supplies, materials, and things that he has on-hand to do what he needs to do. Gear and equipment crosses over genre and setting lines; there's just not going to be much of a difference between a back pack in a pulp-era fantasy setting and one in a Vietnam-era setting, in terms of the overall effect and purpose.

You'll find a catalog of items listed below that are typical for many settings. In addition, you'll find items in the list that are meant to inspire your own lists and give you a base to work with.

Backpack: A good backpack holds 25 to 50 pounds of gear. A modern military backpack (such as the CFP-90 ACU backpack) carries as much as 100 pounds. Backpacks reduce the encumbrance of what's being carried by about a quarter; a 20-pound load comes out to around 15 lb when stowed in a backpack. *Typical Weight:* 3 lbs

Bedroll: Also known as a sleeping bag, a bedroll helps to protect your character from the weather or environment while he rests or sleeps. Advanced bedrolls have weather-reflective weaves or even their own internal power source. *Typical Weight:* 4 lbs.

A Dramatic Tool

When it comes to your character's equipment and gear needs, you always have a dramatic tool at hand to help: Plot Points.

Plot Points allow you to augment scenes and pull your character's rear end out of the fire. When a problem comes up, and your character might need a piece of gear (let's say he forgot to write it down), your Game Master could always allow you to spend a number of Plot Points to obtain it. How many Plot Points it costs depends upon how important the piece of gear is and how important the scene or situation might be in regards to the storyline. The more dramatic, the more your Game Master should make it cost you.

If you're the Game Master, this dramatic tool works for you, too, but in the opposite way. You can use Plot Points as a reward or cushion for taking away gear and equipment. This reward is a sort of "thank you" for going along with the complication in the story. You don't want to do this a lot, but at times it can be a great tool to amp the drama and "hurt" the characters a little bit while still rewarding the player for being a good sport and going along with the action. As with all good things, moderation is the key.

Here's an example. Let's say a detective (the player character) is trying to pick a lock in order to duck into a room before some approaching thugs see him. You might want him to get into a scuffle, for whatever reason, so you have one of his lock-picks snap in the lock, effectively breaking the lock (and most definitely his pick) and foiling any attempt on his part to hide. The thugs come around the corner and the fight is on. In this instance, you should reward him 2 Plot Points, because not only did you take away his gear, you forced him into a fight. The character will have to acquire another lock-pick later on, and he probably could use the Plot Points to help clobber those thugs before the whole place knows he's there.

Binoculars: A pair of binoculars allows you to see things at a great distance, though the time period will determine just how intense the magnification is. An 18th century nautical spyglass might only magnify an object two or three times; the highly sophisticated hardware of the 21st century not only provides greater magnification but also finds exact range or employs night vision technology. *Typical Weight:* 1-5 lbs.

Encumbrance

You may not need or want to be burdened with an encumbrance system. You might like to just get right to playing without worrying about accounting for how much your character can carry—so long as it falls within the realm of common sense. Other games and Game Masters require or like to account for every pound and kilogram. If you are one of the former, please feel free to move right on (just remember it's here in case you need to use it), if you are one of the latter, please read on.

Characters may comfortably carry six times their maximum Strength die value in pounds. This is called your **standard** load. An average person, with Strength d6, comfortably carries 36 pounds of adventuring gear. If you have an incredibly strong character, say with d12+d4 Strength, simply add the die values together (16) before multiplying by six. Carrying your standard load imposes no penalty to the character.

Your character can carry more than the standard load, but it starts to impair him. Any amount higher than his standard load and up to twice his standard load is considered **light** encumbrance, which confers a –1 step to your Attributes when performing physical activities and actions (those that use Agility, Strength, or Vitality). This penalty also affects Innate Defense rolls in combat (see **Chapter 5: Rules**)

Up to three times your standard load is medium encumbrance, which confers not only the –1 step penalty but reduces movement by one quarter. Up to four times your standard load is heavy encumbrance, which increases the step penalty to –2, reduces your movement by half, and makes it impossible to run or sprint. Five times your standard load means that you're encumbered; your movement is reduced by three quarters, and not only can't you run or sprint, you can't perform dodge actions.

It may be possible to lift or even carry more than an extreme load, but doing so should only be done for a short time, and absolutely no other actions should be possible, and movement should be reduced to no more than a speed of 1 for the round. Game masters will need to make a call for any given situation.

Briefcases & Satchels: Briefcases and satchels come in a fairly standard shape and size, but can differ greatly in the material from which they are constructed. They can be made of canvas, worked leather, and even bullet-resistant metals and polymers, and usually hold up to 10 pounds of compact material. *Typical Weight:* 2-5 lbs.

Camera: Any device that records an image, from still-life images on film to a holographic recording on a nanochip, may be described as a camera. The quality and extent of any camera to produce useful images in any medium depends entirely on the time period. Early cameras are large and bulky, while modern cameras are integrated into other devices, such as mobile phones or laptops. *Typical Weight:* 1 - 2 lbs.

Canteen: Canteens hold enough water to keep a single person hydrated for one day and are carried in a pouch on a belt or pack. In archaic or fantasy campaigns, the waterskin serves as an equivalent. *Typical Weight:* 2 lbs (full).

Chemical Body Warmer: Warmth and comfort are provided for up to four hours by this item, a small pouch containing chemicals that heat when agitated or mixed together. CBWs grant a +1 Skill step to Survival actions in cold environments. *Typical Weight:* Negligible.

Climbing Gear: This is more a category of equipment then one single item. It includes rope, grappling hooks, harnesses, ascenders, pitons, hammers, ice-picks, spiked footwear, and so on. Climbing gear grants a +1 or +2 Skill step bonus to climbing actions. *Typical Weight:* 10 lbs.

Compass: Magnetic compasses indicate the direction of the magnetic pole, eliminating the need to take a Survival action to do so. Powerful magnets or even large structures can play havoc with the reliability of a compass. *Typical Weight:* Negligible.

Computer: Historically, computers have progressed from adding machines the size of a small house to miniature nanotech devices embedded into everyday articles. The sophistication and computational powers of a given computer completely depends upon the technological advancements of a setting. For the most part, computers are scaled in three sizes: desktop, laptop, and handheld. Laptop computer terminals, known as SATCOMs (Satellite Communications), can also be used for real-time communications anywhere in the world where an orbiting satellite has line-of-sight. *Typical Weight:* 10 lbs (desktop), 3 lbs (laptop), 1 lb (PDA).

Evidence Kit: A basic evidence kit has sanitary containers, gloves, swabs, brushes, and other tools used to collect evidence at a crime scene. More advanced kits have supplies used to aid in the detection and analyzing of substances. They also have the materials needed to do molds for footprints and tire tracks. *Typical Weight:* 5 lbs (basic), 8 lbs (deluxe).

First Aid Kit: A medical, or first aid kit, is a simple, portable kit that can be used to help treat wounds. They are usually little more than a few bandages, some antiseptic wound-cleaner and perhaps some pain

relievers. A first aid kit could also be, say in a far-future setting, a technological device of some kind, or in a high-magic setting could be a magical construct or "healing-stone." Trying to give first aid without the kit, or similar materials, imposes a –2 Skill step penalty to the action. *Typical Weight:* 3 lbs.

Flares: A flare produces intense light and heat without an explosion and is most often used for signaling or illuminating an area. A flare generally lasts for five to 15 minutes and illuminates a 15-to 50-foot area, all depending upon the design. Flares may ignite flammable or combustible items when touched to them, at Game Master's discretion. A flare might also cause damage to someone, perhaps doing as much as a d2 of Basic damage per round. Some flares are designed to be shot into the sky by a flare-gun, which can launch a flare up to 500 feet. *Typical Weight:* 4 oz.

Flashlight: A device that illuminates through the use of directed light, as opposed to a more radial light source, such as a lantern or candle. Flashlights are powered through some electrical means, be they batteries or electrical-friction of magnets. Flashlights come in many sizes and levels of illumination. *Typical Weight:* 1 – 2 lbs.

Flask: A container that is used to carry a small amount of liquid—usually an alcoholic drink. *Typical Weight:* Negligible.

Flint and Steel: The "match" as we know it today wasn't developed until after 1850. Prior to that, the more archaic means of striking fire was necessary, the most common of which was with a piece of flint-rock and steel. By striking them together sparks are created, which could be used to spark a fire. *Typical Weight:* 4 oz.

Gasmask: A mask worn over the face and head that filters air, protecting the wearer from various toxins such as the tear gas used by modern police and military forces, or from deadly agents such as the mustard gas used on the bloody fields of World War I. *Typical Weight:* 3 lbs.

Glow Stick: A small tube of transparent plastic that contains chemical substances capable of producing light through reaction. It does not require an electrical power source, such as batteries in a flashlight, or a fuel source, such as oil in a lamp. Modern glow sticks are disposable; once used, they cannot be used again. They are extremely resistant to weather effects, and due to their sealed chemoluminescence are safe for use in dangerous or toxic environments. A far-future setting might have glow sticks that simply need to be recombined or re-agitated in order to produce light. In a fantasy setting, one could have clay-like stone that, when compacted by the human hand (for instance), provides illumination, which dims as the material returns to a natural state. *Typical Weight:* 4 oz.

Lantern: Lanterns are devices that illuminate a broad area, as opposed to a narrow beam of light provided by a flashlight. They are, by nature, portable devices. They tend to use fuel sources, such as oil, or electrical sources, such as batteries. They illuminate through fire (as with oil-wicks or candles), with modern lanterns using light bulbs or LEDs. *Typical Weight:* 2 lbs.

Lighters & Matches: A lighter is a small, pocket-sized device used to create fire. It houses a small reservoir of fuel (gas or liquid) and a mechanical device that easily engenders sparks to ignite the fuel. Matches are wooden or paper sticks that, when struck properly, ignite the stick into a short-lived flame. Some matches require a special surface to ignite them, where as others can be "struck" anywhere. Futuristic lighters might be electrical or perhaps even use laser technology. Lighters tend to be more useful in hostile environments than matches. *Typical Weight:* Negligible.

Lockpicks: A typically small set of tools designed to navigate its way through a locking mechanism, releasing the mechanism to open a door or container lid. What a given set of lockpicks looks like depends upon the locks of a given setting. A fantasy setting, where magic locks are common, might be composed of various crystals. A pulp-era crime figure might need a series of needles and picks to navigate his way through a lock. A modern detective might use a "lockpick gun," a small gun-like device that is simple inserted into a lock, a trigger is pulled and the lock opens. And a more futuristic setting might need a hand-held device that scans for a lock's given frequencies, sends out a burst of radio waves and then opens the lock. It is often illegal to posses such items. *Typical Weight:* 1 lb.

Mobile Phone: Regardless of the actual specifications, a mobile phone offers a means of keeping lines of communication open between characters. This includes walkie-talkies, tactical-radios, or far-future comlinks. Modern and future mobile phones might even be combined with other gear, such as handheld personal organizers or wireless network portals. *Typical Weight:* 1 lb.

MRE: MRE, or "Meal, Ready-to-Eat," is a package of food to be consumed typically in one sitting. MREs have a reputation for being edible, but not particularly tasteful. Modern packages contain an entrée, side dish, dessert, cracker or bread, a spread (cheese, peanut butter, etc.), powdered beverage, utensils, and some other accessories

such as chewing gum, matches, toilet paper, etc. More primitive or fantasy-oriented "MREs" are often called trail-rations or even iron-rations. A futuristic or high-fantasy setting might allow for a simple power-bar or a form of special bread. *Typical Weight:* 1 lb each.

Multi-Tool: This is a portable hand tool combining several functions. It's small enough to be carried in a pocket or in a belt-pouch. One of the most known examples of a multi-tool is the Swiss Army knife, which contains a selection of cutting blades, nail files, tweezers, scissors, tooth pick, magnifying glass, and screwdriver bits, among other things. Basically, any multi-purpose, compact, and easily portable device that tackles an assorted amount of tasks is a multi-tool. *Typical Weight:* 8 oz.

Media Players/Recorders: From portable radios to compact digital video players, media players tend to have only a play function. Some devices record audio elements on tape or in a digital format, allowing for long-term storage and instant playback. *Typical Weight:* ½ lb.

Night-Vision Gear: These devices intensify the light of a given area beyond the normal ability of the human eye. They may also provide the ability to see in other spectrums of light, such as ultraviolet or infrared, or even allow your character to see in a thermographic scale. Night-vision gear is usually high-tech, with advanced models being even more compact and lightweight. Far-future settings might allow for a simple visor or cybernetic implants, a fantasy setting might provide for magical goggles to perform a similar function, and in a steampunk setting it might simply be an alchemical concoction. *Typical Weight:* 3 lbs.

Restraints: From heavy manacles and handcuffs to plastic zip-ties and magnetic locking devices, restraints are used to restrain the movement and mobility of a person. Some have simple bolts securing them, others use locks and keys, and still others use computer codes. A straightjacket is a long-term upper body restraint. *Typical Weight:* 1 lb.

Rope: Rope can be used for more then just climbing: it can be used to bind objects, as a tool to help in moving objects, and it's an important tool in exploration and seafaring. Rope is made from natural materials, such as hemp, silk, hair, wool, linen, cotton, and sisal, as well as synthetic materials like nylon, polyesters, and the like. Some ropes are made out of braided metal. Coils of rope are often secured with a grappling hook on one end to ease climbing efforts. *Typical Weight:* 4 lbs (50 feet)

Sensors: A chemical, mechanical or electrical device used primarily to detect or measure something. *Typical Weight:* 2–5 lbs. To name a few:

- Altimeters measure altitude.
- Chemical analyzers break down and determine chemical compositions.
- Bomb-sniffers are a form of chemical analyzer used to find explosive devices through the use of highly advanced chemical–sensing tools and software.
- Geiger counters measure radiation.
- Polygraph machines are used as lie detectors through the measurement of pulse and body reflexes.
- Metal detectors range from small hand-held wands to full-size screens.
- Weather sensors are used to determine wind-speed, barometric pressure, humidity, and more.
- Global Positioning Systems (GPS) tie into satellite systems to determine location with accuracy to 15 feet.

Sextant: A sextant measures celestial objects in relation to the horizon. The most common use of a sextant was finding one's latitude, important in sea-going adventures, and for calculating your position on a chart or map. *Typical Weight:* 1 lb.

Surgical Kit: This is more advanced than a simple first aid kit. It has a number of tools and medicines that aid in the diagnosis and treatment of ailments, such as a microscope. It also contains the tools and medicines needed to perform all but the most complex surgery. Trying to perform surgery without the kit imposes at least a –2 skill step penalty to the task roll. *Typical Weight:* 5 lbs.

Surveillance Gear: Tolls and gear used to spy on others. Includes simple video cameras and monitors, listening bugs, parabolic microphones, fiberscopes, thermal imagers, telephone taps, cellular interceptors and beyond. *Typical Weight:* 1-5 lbs.

Tent: A temporary shelter that can be broken down and carried is a tent. Simple tents can protect one or two people from the weather, while complex ones can be the size of a house, even having separate "chambers." *Typical Weight:* 4 lbs (2 person), 7 lbs (4 person), or 10 lbs (8 person).

Tools: These are the basic tools used for construction or the tools needed to repair and maintain automobiles. They include hammers, nail guns, a variety of saws, and specialized futuristic versions of these. Other tools include anvils, block-and-tackle, chain, crowbars, files, ladders, pliers, razors, shovels, sledge-hammers, tongs, wrenches, and so forth. Performing a task without an appropriate tool or tool kit may impose a –1 Skill step to your efforts. *Typical Weight:* 2–20 lbs.

Toolkits, Specialty: A number of specialized kits exist to enable certain actions to be taken with improved success. Some examples follow. Well-designed kits might

grant a +1 or +2 Skill step to actions, while working without any tools imposes a –1 Skill step or prevents the action from being taken.

Demolition kits support demolition-based actions. It has the tools needed to analyze an explosive device and disable it or even craft an explosive device, assuming the core explosives are on hand. *Typical Weight:* 6-9 lbs

Electrician kits are as complex as the technology of the setting in which they are found. *Typical Weight:* 5 lbs.

Gunsmith kits have all the tools and needs to clean, maintain, and repair firearms as small as derringers to as large as SAW (squad automatic weapons) machine guns. *Typical Weight:* 5 lbs.

Mechanical kits contain an assortment of tools and devices needed to maintain and repair mechanical devices. Such devices are as complex as the technology of the setting in which they are found. *Typical Weight:* 5 lbs.

Torch: A basic torch is a stick with some kind of flammable material on one end that is used as a primitive light source. It could be something as benign as a tree branch to a crafted metal device. Torches could have a magical alchemical source or, in the case of historical advancements of the Romans, be made from sulfur and lime, and remain alight even after being plunged into water. *Typical Weight:* 1 lb.

Watch: A wristwatch or pocket watch is indicative of technology from the 19th century onwards. A fantasy setting might instead have a small orb, with a light within that tells your character where the sun might be in the sky. Futuristic settings often refer to watches as chronometers. *Typical Weight:* Negligible.

Clothing & Armor

It's said that the clothes make the man, and in role playing games this is very much the case. The type of clothing or armor you wear is indicative of what your role in a given game. An iconic spy wouldn't be caught dead without a finely pressed tuxedo, while certain archaeologist-explorers risk life-and-limb with an action-defying fedora or tight shorts and shoulder holsters. Knights of the realm are encased in steel armor, while their arcane companions brave the same dangers dressed in wizard's robes.

The era in question, and the genre that it supports, plays a large part in determining how influential clothing and armor are. The cloak, tabard, knee-high boots and tricorn hat of an Italian Renaissance campaign have no place in the trenches of Verdun, the deserts of Iraq, or the crime-ridden streets of the Los Angeles. In comparison, gym shoes, blue jeans, and T-shirts would be impossibly improper in a Victorian sitting—a young woman wearing shorts and a T-shirt showing up at some grand event would be tossed in jail or the local asylum.

Clothing crosses over genre lines rather easily, however, and you should only get as detailed as you wish to be. After all, a character could wear "boots, pants, and a shirt" in any setting, from fantasy to pulp to modern and far future. What they're made of, how they look, and how society views them are all stylistic questions of the campaign. What follows are some suggestions on how to approach these matters of style.

Is the clothing in fashion? Is it "current" within the genre/setting? A lady of the Victorian era might have as many as seven layers of clothing (including the corset), only one of which was the actual outer garment or dress.

Are the clothes well made and of good material? The 1940's pulp detective is looking for a saboteur. While he asks around he notices one of the homeless men under the bridge has shoes with practically brand new leather. That might raise an eyebrow.

Are the clothes presentable and well maintained? Are they shabby? The elder statesman has fallen out of favor, and in his later years his appearance is less crisp and polished than it was in his youth. His boots go unpolished, his collars and cuff fray, and a hole develops in the underarm of his jacket.

Do the clothes evoke some kind of specific reaction or have a specific role in society? A caped crusader of the night evokes fear in the hearts of the villains he is fighting. A police officer wears a uniform; a server at the local restaurant has to have a certain amount of "flair" on her outfit; doctors often wear white-lab coats. The musketeer of a king will present his order's sigil brazenly, even in the lands of his king's enemy, and a guerrilla insurgent wears whatever clothing best camouflages him from his foes, be that drab military clothing or typical street fare of the local populace.

Specialized Suits

The following is a list of specialized outfits. Some are only applicable in certain settings. Some might fit in other settings, but it might take some work. While some outfits provide an Armor Value, they're not designed for their combat value as much meeting the needs of a specific role. For instance, a fireman's rig is protective and worn as a defense against fire, but it's to help him put out fires, not for him to enter into hand-to-hand combat with street thugs.

Note that suits and armor often protect against damage. See **Chapter 5: Rules** for detailed information about the role of such protection in the game.

Bomb Squad Suit: This suit offers protection from explosives, while allowing enough maneuverability to work with them. Bomb squad suits have an Armor Value of 8 W, but impose a –1 Skill step to Perception and a –2 Skill step to Athletics actions when worn. *Typical Weight:* 30 lbs.

Camouflage Suit: These range from the Ghillie suit, worn by snipers the world over, to the drab combat fatigues or Battle Dress Uniforms (BDUs) worn in sustained engagements by soldiers. Ghillie suits aid in blending into heavy underbrush, and are covered and layered with strips of cloth and twine. BDUs are more standard but feature patterns and colors suitable for blending in. The wearer of a camouflage suit gains between a +1 (BDUs and other improvised camo clothing) to +3 (Ghillie suits) Skill step bonus to Covert actions when hiding from his enemies.*Typical Weight:* 6 lbs.

Cold-Weather Gear: This is a suit of specialized materials that aids in protection against the cold. It includes a jacket, boots, pants, and gloves. A character with a cold-weather suit gains a +2 Skill step to Survival actions in cold climates. *Typical Weight:* 8 lbs.

Diving Suits: These large, pressurized exoskeleton suits are used for deep-sea exploration. An oxygen system provides eight hours of operation. The artificial appendages have limited grabbing ability. The wearer of the diving suit is considered heavily encumbered, but it provides an Armor Value of 5 W. *Typical Weight:* 25 lbs.

Fire-Fighting: This suit of specialized materials aids in protection against heat and fire. It includes a helmet, face-guard, jacket, boots, pants, and gloves. A character with a fire-fighting suit gains a +2 Attribute step to Vitality for actions in hot climates or to Endurance and Resistance rolls against heat dangers. It also confers an Armor Value of 4 B. *Typical Weight:* 15 lbs.

Flight Suit: Flight suits are designed to protect a pilot against aviation dangers. The most notable purpose of a flight suit is to aid a pilot in resisting G-forces he has to deal with. The flight suit also protects the pilot from rounds or shrapnel that pierce the cockpit of the plane. The suit has an Armor Value of 2 B. *Typical Weight:* 20 lbs.

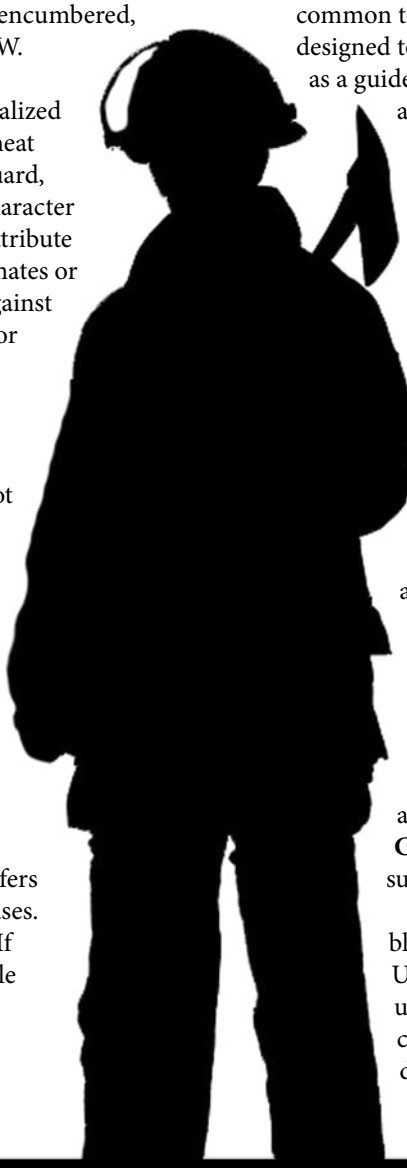
NBC Suit: Each Nuclear/Biological/Chemical suit allows someone to operate, for as much as six hours, in an environment contaminated with radioactive, chemical, or biological agents. It confers immunity to airborne disease and gases. The suit has an Armor Value of 1 B. If your character sustains Wounds while wearing the suit, the environmental protection of the suit is lost. *Typical Weight:* 25 lbs.

SCUBA Suit: Each Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus (SCUBA) suit contains a mask, flippers, weighted belt, and snorkel. The suit allows your character to work underwater for up to three hours before new oxygen tanks are needed. *Typical Weight:* 18 lbs.

Space Suit: Any character who wears a space suit may work and maneuver in the vacuum of space for up to six hours before the suit's oxygen tanks run out. The suit provides protection from other extreme environmental conditions of space (cold, radiation) by providing a +3 step to Vitality for Endurance or Resistance rolls. The suit has an Armor Value of 5 W. If the character sustains Wounds while wearing the suit, the environmental protection of the suit is compromised or lost completely. *Typical Weight:* 25 lbs.

Armor

In settings where conflict is a frequent occurrence, protective clothing is an important investment for your character. The following items range from archaic armor common to fantasy settings, to high-tech protective gear designed to absorb impact without all that bulk. Use it as a guideline for developing other forms of armor or armored clothing.



Archaic forms of armor are less effective against high-speed ballistic weapons, reducing their effectiveness by half—or to nothing if that would lower than value below 1. The Game Master may decide that certain types of protection are more or less effective against certain types of attacks (magic, energy weapons, sonic energy, etc.). Note also that lugging around a heavy shield or wearing cumbersome armor can make it difficult to gain peak performance on certain actions. The Game Master may impose Skill penalties—or Attribute penalties in cases of severe impairment—to characters who are weighed down by such protection. Skill penalties affect both general and specialties. See the listed armor for examples and use this as a basis when designing new types of armor.

When a character is wearing protection over his brain-box he not only gains the Armor Value against attacks to the head, such attacks will not inflict additional damage (see **Chapter 5: Rules**) except on extraordinary success.

Note on Shields: Shields allow a defensive blocking action during hand-to-hand combat. Using one defensively almost always makes use of the Melee Weapons/Shields Skill and counts as a simple action in combat. Making a defensive action and attacking in the same turn

will incur a multiple action penalty, though the defense action will serve against all opponents attacking from the front. How effective the shield is for defensive actions is based on its size and design. If you simply hold a shield up in front of you, it provides a cover benefit based on its size—though you don't gain a Cover benefit and a defensive action in the same turn, only one or the other. (See **Cover** in **Chapter 5: Rules**.) A shield does not typically offer protection against high-speed ballistic weapons (such as gunfire) unless the description specifically says so.

Chainmail: This is a mesh of interlinked metal rings, usually worn over a padded suit of cloth. A corslet of mail covers the torso and upper arms, while a full chain hauberk covers almost the entire body. Armor Value of 4 W. *Typical Weight:* 25 lbs (corslet), 35 lbs (hauberk).

Coat, Armored "Duster": This is a tough leather coat augmented with flexible mail and rigid plating around the shoulders. Armor Value of 4 W. *Typical Weight:* 10 lbs.

Half-Plate Armor: Half-plate armor consists of a hauberk of chainmail augmented with a breastplate or cuirass, and sections of plate on the arms and legs. Armor Value of 6 W. *Typical Weight:* 40 lbs.

Helmet, Aviation: This helmet protects against extreme altitude or low air pressure as well as crash and impact protection. Armor Value of 4 W (head only). *Typical Weight:* 3 lbs.

Helmet, Ballistic: Standard-issue head protection for most modern military ground forces. Armor Value of 4 W (head only). *Typical Weight:* 3 lbs.

Helmet, Riot: Based with a ballistic helmet, the riot helmet also provides a face shield and neck guard for added, close combat protection. Armor Value of 4 W and protects against high-speed projectiles as well as other types of damage. *Typical Weight:* 4 lbs.

Leather Armor: Made of worked leather, this suit has an Armor Value of 2 W. *Typical Weight:* 10 lbs.

Padded Armor: This armor is made of padded cloth. Armor Rating of 1 W. *Typical Weight:* 8 lbs.

Scale-Mail Armor: Also known as "leaf armor," scale mail consists of small metal, leather, or even horn scales attached to leather backing. This armor has an Armor Rating of 4 W. *Typical Weight:* 20 lbs.

Shield, Buckler: This smaller type of shield adds a +1 step bonus to Melee Combat/Shields Skill rolls but may only be used to block against one opponent per defensive action. It offers no cover if held defensively. *Typical Weight:* 10 lbs.

Shield, Heater: This includes kite shields and the Roman *scuta*, and adds a +2 step to Melee Combat/Shields Skill rolls to block against all opponents each turn and serves as light cover if held defensively. *Typical Weight:* 15 lbs.

Shield, Modern: Shields are used for protection in the modern world for two main needs: The first is for riot control, where protection needs tend to be against low-velocity or "soft weaponry." The second is the modern police shield, which is primarily designed to be effective against high-velocity weapons and is bullet resistant, if not bullet proof. Modern shields are crafted of metal and advanced synthetics, such as Kevlar. A modern riot shield adds +2 step bonus to Melee Combat/Shields Skill rolls to block. It is effective against high-speed ballistics, and serves as light cover if held defensively. *Typical Weight:* 6 lbs.

Table 4.2: Armor

Type	Armor Rating	Step Penalty
Chainmail	4W	–1 Athletics
Coat, Armored "Duster"	4W	–1 Athletics
Half-Plate Armor	6W	–2 Athletics, –1 Perception
Helmet, Aviation	4W (Head only)	–1 Perception
Helmet, Ballistic	4W (Head only)	–1 Perception
Helmet, Riot	4W See discription	–1 Perception
Leather Armor	2W	—
Padded Armor	1W	—
Scale-Mail Armor	4W	–1 Athletics
Shield, Buckler	See description	—
Shield, Heater	See description	—
Shield, Modern	See description	—
Shield, Target	See description	—
Vest, Ballistic	2W	—
Vest, Tactical Deployment	2W	—
Vest, Undercover	2W	—

Shield, Target: This circular shield, which includes the Scottish targe and other medium-sized shields, adds a +1 step bonus to Melee Combat/Shields Skill rolls to block against all opponents each turn and offers light cover if held defensively. *Typical Weight:* 6 lbs.

Vest, Ballistic: This armored vest is worn by modern law enforcement personnel. Ballistic vests have an Armor Rating of 2 W, but as an additional benefit they convert up to 4 additional Wound to Stun (or Shock Points if the victims suffers too much Stun). *Typical Weight:* 8 lbs.

Vest, Tactical Deployment: A light-ballistic vest that has a large number of pouches and pockets on it where additional or essential gear may be stored. Ballistic vests have an Armor Rating of 2 W, but as an additional benefit they convert up to 2 additional Wound to Stun (or Shock Points if the victims suffers too much Stun). *Typical Weight:* 5 lbs.

Vest, Undercover: A protective vest worn by those seeking some level of added security but not at the cost of secrecy. Undercover vests have an Armor Rating of 2 W, but as an additional benefit they convert 2 additional Wound to Stun (or Shock Points if the victims suffers too much Stun). *Typical Weight:* 5 lbs.

Table 4.3: Melee Weapons

Weapon	Damage
Axe	d8 W
Axe, Hand	d6 W
Bayonet (Mounted)	d4 W
Brass Knuckles	Special
Chain, Length	d4 B
Chain, Armed	d6 B
Chainsaw	d10 W
Club, Light	d4 B
Club, Heavy	d6 B
Garrote	d2 S
Knife	d2 W
Polearm	d6 W
Staff	d6 B
Stunner, Contact	d6 S + Special
Sword, Arming	d6 W
Sword, Dueling	d6 W
Sword, Laser	d12 W
Sword, Scimitar	d6 W
Sword, Short	d4 W
Sword, Two-Handed	d8 W

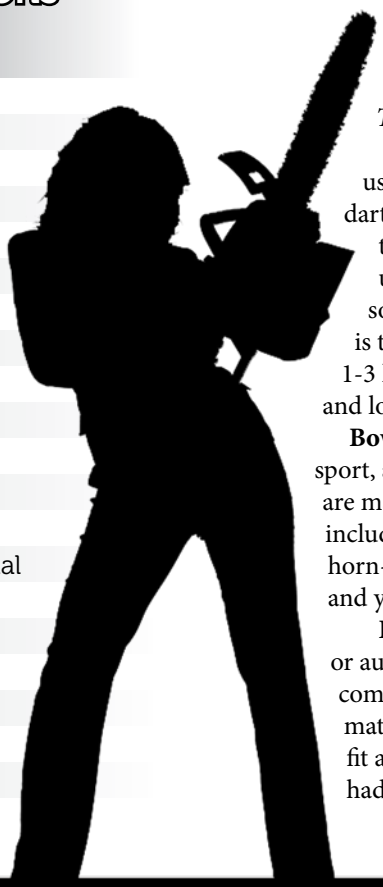
Weapons

With emphasis on story and fast-moving action, the Cortex System handles weapons in categories to understand game effects and leaves the specifics to description and imagination. So if a English knight is fighting a Saracen warrior during the Crusades, both warriors are wielding swords—one a longsword and the other a curved scimitar. While descriptively, the blades and styles of fighting are very different, but in game terms they work exactly the same. Players are welcome to work with their Game Masters to customize weaponry (or other gear), but always beware adding unnecessary complexity that will slow things down.

Weapon Descriptions

Axe: Axes are hafted weapons topped with a metal head, a double-headed axe is known as a battle-axe. Axes deliver more cleaving power against a smaller target area, making it them effective against armor. *Typical Weight:* 6-15 lbs. There are a variety of axes, including: danish, dao, labrys, lochabre, masakari, ono, sagaris, sparth, tungi and Viking bearded axe.

Axe, Hand or Throwing: Smaller siblings to the large war and battle-axes, hand axes are lighter of Weight: and are often balanced for throwing. *Typical Weight:* 2 lbs. There are a variety of axes, including: bhuj, francisca, hurlbat, ice axes, kapak, nazappa zap, tabar and tomahawk.



Bayonet: A bayonet is basically a knife or dagger that fits on the muzzle of a firearm barrel, which effectively turns the firearm and dagger into a spear of sorts. *Typical Weight:* 1 lb.

Blowgun: The blowgun is a long tube used to launch needles and darts. The darts fired from a blowgun are small, and by themselves not usually lethal, but they are used as a delivery system for a toxin of some sort. The most famous blowgun toxin is the South American *curare*. *Typical Weight:* 1-3 lbs. Some blowguns are: cherokee, fukiya, and loire.

Bow: The bow is a weapon used for hunting, sport, and warfare. *Typical Weight:* 2-5 lbs. There are many bows from different cultures and times, including: compound bows, daikyu, flat-bows, horn-bows, longbows, recurve-bows, shortbow and yumi.

Brass Knuckles: Brass knuckles improve or augment the damage of a hand-to-hand combat attack. They are metal (or composite materials in a modern setting) and shaped to fit around the hand or knuckles. The Romans had a version called the cestus, which was a

glove made from leather and metal. When attacking with brass knuckles, damage from unarmed attacks is Basic instead of Stun. (See Unarmed Combat in Chapter Five.) Brass knuckles are often built into knives, to extend the usefulness of the weapon. Some other brass knuckles are: bagh nakh, knuckle-duster, tekko, vajra and mushti.

Chain: A simple length of chain with weighted ends can be whirled to strike at the target, or used to entangle a person. Improvised chains are also common in modern settings as the opportunity weapon of a street thug or gang leader. *Typical Weight:* 2-8 lbs. Some chain weapons are: kusari-fundo, manriki, manriki-gusari and surujin.

Chain, Armed: Armed chain weapons have a variety of dangerous extras on one or both ends of the weapon and can be hafted on shafts. Such weapons are usually used to trip someone, but they were also developed to reach above or around protective measures, such as shields. *Typical Weight:* 3-15 lbs. Some armed chain

Table 4.4: Ranged Weapons

Weapon	Damage	Range Increment (feet)	Ammo	Firing Options
Axe, Throwing	d4 W	15	—	—
Blowgun	Special	25	1	—
Bow, Compound	d6 W	100	1	—
Bow, Long	d4 W	90	1	—
Bow, Short	d4 W	70	1	—
Crossbow, Hand/Light	d2 W	40	1	—
Crossbow, Medium	d4 W	80	1	—
Crossbow, Heavy	d6 W	120	1	—
Knife, Throwing	d2 W	10	—	—
Mace/Pepper Spray	Special	3	5	—
Machine Gun, Energy	d12+d4 W	300	50	Burst/Automatic
Machine Gun, Light	d2 W (Large)	300	100	Burst/Automatic
Machine Gun, Heavy	d4 W (Large)	500	100	Burst/Automatic
Pistol, Black-Powder	d6 W	15	1	—
Pistol, Energy	d8 W	50	50	—
Pistol, Light	d4 W	40	2-6	—
Pistol, Medium	d6 W	50	5-10	—
Pistol, Pneumatic	d2 S	25	1	—
Pistol, Heavy	d6 W	60	5-10	—
Rifle, Assault	d8 W	200	30	Burst/Automatic
Rifle, Black-Powder	d8 W	25	1	—
Rifle, Bolt-Action	d8 W	300	20	—
Rifle, Energy	d12 W	250	50*	Burst/Automatic
Rifle, Light Sniper	d8 W	450	5-10	—
Rifle, Heavy Sniper	d12 W	500	5-10	—
Rifle, Pneumatic	d4 S	75	1	—
Shotgun, Automatic	d10 W	40	4-10	—
Shotgun, Black-Powder	d10 W	10	1	—
Shotgun, Break-Loading	d10 W	40	1-2	—
Shotgun, Energy	d12+d8 W	40	50*	—
Shotgun, Pump Action	d10 W	40	4-10	—
Shotgun, Sawed-Off	d10 W	20	4-10	—
Shotgun, Semi-Automatic	d10 W	40	4-10	—
Sling/Slingshot	d4 B	25	1	—
Stunner, Ranged	Special	3	5	—
Submachine Gun	d6 W	50	20-30	Burst/Automatic

weapons are: chijiriki, chain-and-dagger, flail (light, medium, and heavy), kau sin ke, kusari-gama, nunchaku, and three-section-staff.

Chainsaw: Frequently used by various crazed madmen, the chainsaw is an impractical weapon (loud, messy, and unwieldy), but does have a certain cinematic-horror quality to it. Most chainsaws count as improvised weapons, since they weren't designed for combat. Combat-ready chainsaws may, of course, exist in your setting. *Typical Weight:* 2-8 lbs.

Club, Light: Light clubs are one-handed bashing weapons made of wood, bone, or metal (some heavy handled flashlights are used as clubs). An alternate to the club is the side-handle baton, which has a short side handle at a right angle to the shaft. *Typical Weight:* 3-5 lbs. Some clubs are: asp, baton, billy club, cuffing baton, jitte, muton, night-stick, sai, shillelagh, spring cosh, tonfa, and truncheon.

Club, Heavy: Heavy clubs are two-handed bashing weapons. *Typical Weight:* 5-12 lbs. Some heavy clubs are: baseball bats, chang-bang, gada and tetsubo.

Crossbow: A crossbow replaces the physical pull of a standard bow with some kind of mechanical contrivance and a trigger release. As such, they became more common than standard bows because almost anyone could become trained in their use. *Typical Weight:* 3-10 lbs. Some crossbows are: arbalest, chu ko nu, chuangzi nu, and hand-held.

Garrote: A garrote is a chain, rope, scarf, wire, or other length of material used to strangle someone to death. Assassins favor it because when used properly silences the opponent as they are murdered. Garrotes are easily hidden, and may even be built into other devices (such as a wristwatch in an espionage campaign). When taken by surprise an opponent must make an Average Resistance (Vitality + Vitality) roll to avoid falling unconscious. The Resistance roll's Difficulty increases by +2 on every subsequent turn. An unconscious victim is then easily dispatched. *Typical Weight:* negligible.

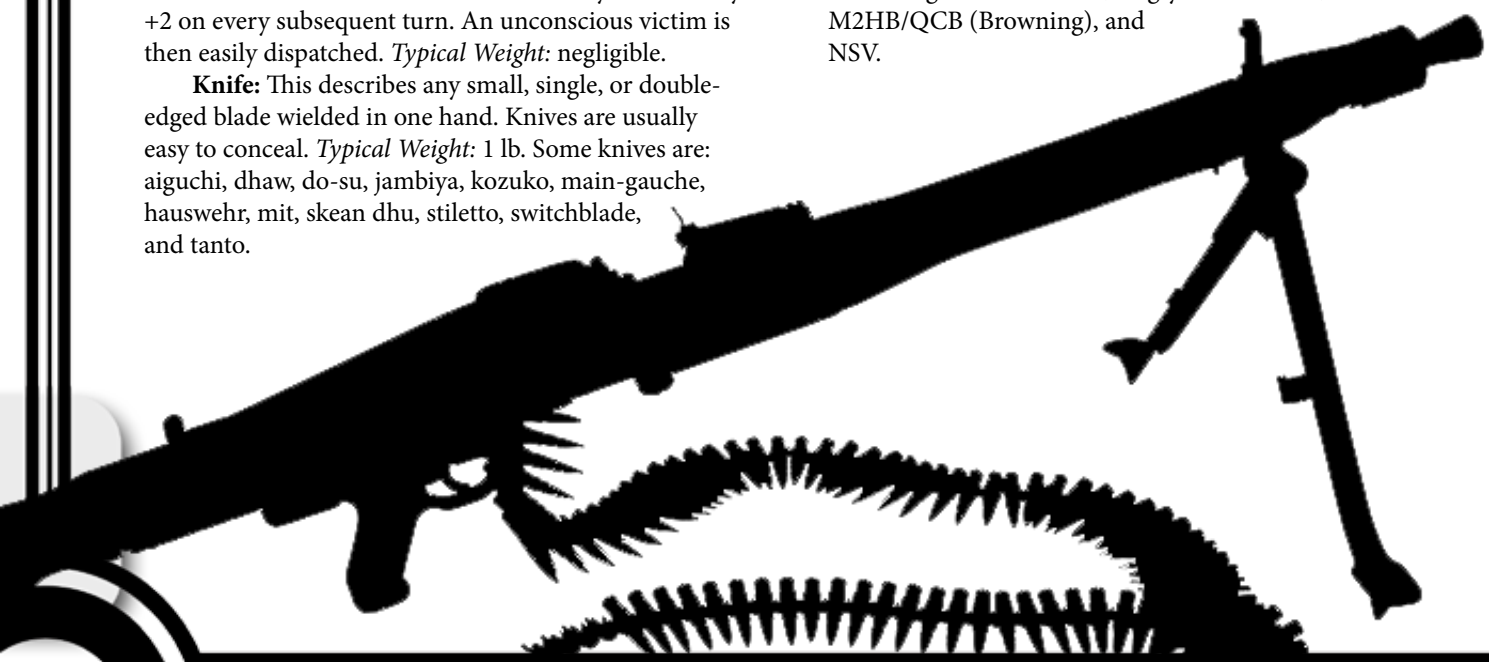
Knife: This describes any small, single, or double-edged blade wielded in one hand. Knives are usually easy to conceal. *Typical Weight:* 1 lb. Some knives are: aiguchi, dhaw, do-su, jambiya, kozuko, main-gauche, hauswehr, mit, skean dhu, stiletto, switchblade, and tanto.

Mace/Pepper Spray: This chemical irritant comes in a variety of delivery systems, though it's usually in a can. When attacked by pepper spray, the target takes Stun damage (usually between d4 and d10, dependant upon the toxicity of the spray) and then must make a Hard (11) Resistance (Vitality + Vitality) action. If they succeed, they then suffer a –1 Attribute step to all attempts to see (which would include fighting, obviously) and concentrate for the next few minutes. If they fail, the penalty increases to –3 steps, and lasts for several minutes. At the Game Master's discretion, chemical spray weapons released within a small, enclosed area (say like an elevator) might very well affect everyone in that area. *Typical Weight:* 10-50 lbs.

Machine Gun: Machine guns are designed to riddle a target or area with a astonishing amount of firepower, yet remain portable, or at least fairly mobile. Machine guns use higher caliber ammunition and can volley said ammunition with an incredible rate of fire.

Machine Gun, Energy: A laser, plasma, photon, etc., energy-based machine gun. Portable but works better if used from a stable firing platform; typically an attacker should suffer a –1 Skill step penalty if firing a machine gun from an unstable position. It's reasonable that some energy weapons could do more or less damage, depending upon power source and technology than indicated in the table. Also, many energy weapons can be set to inflict either Stun or Wound damage.

Machine Gun, Heavy: Heavy machine guns fire large rounds, typically in the .50 caliber or 12.7x107mm. Very few heavy machine guns are truly portable and work best if used from a stable firing platform; attackers suffer a –3 Skill step penalty if firing a heavy machine gun from an unstable position. This weapon is actually able to take out many; it is a Large Scale weapon (See the **A Matter of Scale** sidebar on page 72). Some heavy machine guns are: .50 CIS, Degtyraev DShKM, M2HB/QCB (Browning), and NSV.



Machine Gun, Light: A light machine gun usually fires rounds in the 5.56 or 7.62 caliber. Most light machine guns are portable but still work better if used from a stable firing platform; attackers suffer a –1 Skill step penalty if firing a machine gun "from the hip." This weapon is actually able to take out many; it is a Large Scale weapon (see the **A Matter Of Scale** sidebar on page 72). Some light machine guns are: FN MAG, HK 21E, M16A2 LMG, M249 SAW, M-60, Rheinmetall MG42/59, Styer AUG, and Ultimax 100

Pistol: This is by far the most common weapon of the modern era. They can be used in tight quarters, and are typically light, easily carried and, in some cases, easy to conceal. Handguns are typically divided into two types, revolvers and automatics. *Typical Weight:* 1-3 lbs.

Pistol, Black-Powder: The earliest handguns were muzzle-loaded weapons. Striking flints or burning cords ignited the black powder of the weapon, which then delivered the round. Some black-powdered pistols are: 1851 Navy Colt, Derringer, duck's-foot, harper's ferry pistol, howdah, matchlock, pepperbox, snaphaunce, touchlock, and wheellock.

Pistol, Pneumatic: Pneumatic weapons utilize compressed air as the source of energy to drive the projectile. Pneumatic weapons tend to be quiet, but also tend to be slow firing. Pneumatic handguns are typically "dart guns" which are meant to deliver a toxin through the delivery of a dart; these weapons are typically refered to as "capture guns." Some pneumatic weapons are: airsoft, CO_2, dart-guns, girandoni, multi-stroke, pre-charged, single-stroke, and spudgun.

Pistol, Energy: A handheld laser, plasma, or photon energy pistol, or it could be a tube of captured lightning bolts. It's reasonable that some energy weapons could do more or less damage, depending upon power source and technology than indicated in the table. Also, many energy weapons can be set to do either Stun or Wound damage.

Pistol, Light: Guns such as the .22 caliber, .32 ACP and .38 caliber handguns fall into the light category. Some light handguns are: Mark 2Ruger Service-Six, Scorpion, and Walther PPK.

Pistol, Medium: Guns such as the 9mm, 10mm and .45 caliber handguns fall into the medium category. Some medium handguns are: Berretta 92F, Colt Double-Eagle, Glock 17, Glock 20, HK .45 Mk23 USSOCOM, M1911A1, Model 950, SIG-Sauer P220, and Tek-9.

Pistol, Heavy: Guns such as the .357, .44 caliber, .50 caliber and 5.57mm handguns fall into the heavy category. Some heavy handguns are: Colt Python, Desert Eagle, FN Five-Seven, M29 Magnum Revolver, and Tokarev.

Polearm: The main business end of a polearm is placed on the end of a long shaft of wood. There are two reasons to mount a weapon-head in such a manner. The first is to extend reach, and the second reason is to increase momentum. *Typical Weight:* 4-15 lbs. There are dozens of varieties of polearms, some of which include: ahlsiess, bardiches, bec de corbin, chan, corsesca, couteau de breche, craisech, fauchard, glaive, javelin, hasta, lembing, lucerne hammer, mao, nagamaki, naginata, partisan, pollaxes, ranseur, sarissa, sasumata, sodegarami, spetum, trident, and yari.

Rifle: A firearm with a grooved barrel is a rifle. The rifling of the barrel forces the munitions to spin, which increases the accuracy of the weapon. *Typical Weight:* 6-12 lbs.

Rifle, Assault: In most modern militaries, assault rifles are the standard weapons. They tend to be magazine fed, fairly light (especially considering the firepower they possess) and highly accurate with a high rate of fire. Some assault rifles are: AK-47, AK-74, CAR-15, FN-FAL, HK-G3A3, M-1 Garand, M14 Carbine, M16 (A2 & Commando), SA80, and Stoner SR-25

Rifle, Black-Powder: There are few muzzle-loaded rifled weapons, but those that were designed were done so around the early and mid-19th century. Some black powder rifles are: Enfield 1853, Henry Rifle, and Kentucky Rifle.

Rifle, Civilian: Bolt-action rifles have their ammunition manually cycled by the operator in order to chamber the next round. While slower then automatic or semi-automatic assault weapons, the bolt-action weapons are perceived as being more accurate. Civilian rifles are generally used for sport and hunting, but bolt-action weapons were widely used in warfare before the auto-loading process was perfected. Some bolt-action weapons are: Arisaka 38, Gewehr 98, Lee-Enfield, M1903 Springfield, M1917 Enfield, Remington 700, and Winchester Model 70.

Rifle, Energy: An energy-based rifle provides a portable, fairly accurate energy weapon to a large number of soldiers. It's reasonable to assume that some energy weapons do more or less damage, depending upon power source and technology, than indicated in the table. Many energy weapons may be set to inflict either Stun or Wound damage.

Rifle, Pneumatic: Pneumatic weapons use compressed air to deliver a round instead of gunpowder. They're quiet, but lack the rate of fire of others. They've been around since the 15th century; Lewis and Clark had pneumatic rifles with them on their expedition across North America. The BB-gun is the most famous pneumatic weapon, despite the risk of putting one's eye out. Some more potent examples are: airsoft, CO_2, dart-guns, girandoni, multi-stroke, pre-charged, single-stroke, and spudgun.

Rifle, Sniper: Sniper weapons may be both automatic and bolt-action, and tend to fire a heavier caliber round. Sniper rifles are based upon the concept of taking a highly accurate shot. Some sniper rifles are:

AI Covert, Draganov SVD, HK MSG90, HK PSG 1, M21, M82A1 Light Fifty, Model 700 ("Kate") U.S. Marine Sniper Rifle, Remington M24, and Walther WA-2000.

Shotgun: A shotgun fires either a number of pellets (or shot) or a solid slug. When shot is used, the damage is lessened due to the spread of fire but a greater area is targeted by the attack. This explains why shotguns are also called "room sweepers." Beyond shot or slugs, there's a variety of ammunition for shotguns, including rock salt and bean bags. The downside of shotguns is that they have high recoil and tend to be heavy. When a shotgun's barrel is shortened, or "sawed off" the spread of the shot is expanded, thus it's effective range is lessened. In that given area the weapon is just as effective, and it's easier to conceal. *Typical Weight:* 7-12 lbs.

Shotgun, Automatic/Semi-automatic: These shotguns are capable of automatic (or semi-automatic) fire with shotgun ammunition. Examples include: Jackhammer, M1 Super 90, SPAS-12, SPAS-15, and USAS-12.

Shotgun, Black-Powder: Most matchlock and early flintlock muskets fall into the category of shotgun because they lack grooves or rifling. Examples include the blunderbuss, donderbus, and musketoon.

Shotgun, Break Loading: Break loading shotguns have the munitions manually placed into the weapons housing. When the weapon is fired, the weapon must be "broken," the spent round pulled out and the next round placed in individually. Many break-loading shotguns have two parallel barrels, known as "double-barrel" shotguns.

Shotgun, Energy: Energy shotguns deliver an extreme level of power, but are slower to operate. It's reasonable to assume that some energy weapons do more or less damage, depending upon power source and technology. Many energy weapons may be set to do either Stun or Wound damage.

Shotgun, Pump-Action: Pump action, or lever-action shotguns need to "pumped" in order to eject the spent cartridge and load the next cartridge into the housing. Some pump-action shotguns are: Mossberg 500 Police Shotgun, RS202, and Winchester 1300 Defender.

Sling/Slingshot: Slings and slingshots are two separate weapons with the same general effect. The so-called shepherd's sling is a simple weapon made of two lengths of rope, leather, or cord and a small cradle. The ammunition (typically a rock or stone) is placed in the cradle, the sling is whipped around, and then the rock is shot forward through the use of centrifugal force. The slingshot, in contrast, is a weapon more like the bow or crossbow, in that the energy released from a taught-held device projects the weapons ammunition (again, mostly rocks or stones). *Typical Weight:* 1 lb.

Staff: Staves are thick pole weapons, often little more than a single piece of wood. A staff is useful both offensively or defensively, because of its length; you can swing it in wide arcs or make short jabs with either end. *Typical Weight:* 3-6 lbs. Some staff weapons are: bang, bo, lathi, toya, quarterstaff, and rokushakubo.

Stunner, Contact/Ranged: These weapons deliver an electrical shock. There are a number of devices that do this; some require the device to make contact with the target, while others fire electrodes at a modest range. When hit by a stunner, the target takes Stun damage and makes a Hard (11) Resistance (Vitality + Vitality) roll. If they succeed, they suffer a –1 Attribute step to all their attributes for 1 minute; this can accumulate with subsequent attacks. If they fail, they fall immediately unconscious and suffer d6 shock points. *Typical Weight:* 1-2 lbs.

Submachine Gun: A submachine gun uses the same ammunition as a pistol, but with a machine gun's high rate of fire. Submachine guns gained popularity in the 1920's and 1930's and are a hugely popular weapon. *Typical Weight:* 3-6 lbs. Some submachine guns are: Beretta Model 12S, Colt 9 mm, MP5, MP5KAS, Glock MP2000, Ingram M10Micro-UZI, Mini-UZI, Mini SAF, FN P90, Sterling L2a3, .45 Thompson "Tommy" SMG, Walther MPK, and UZI.

Sword: With all of its variations, a sword is essentially a cutting or thrusting weapon made of metal (or perhaps a superscience material in a futuristic setting).

Sword, Arming: The arming sword, also known as the knight's sword or longsword. Most are double-edged with a crossbar hilt. Arming swords may be used either one or two-handed; if used with two hands, the damage die increases by +1 step. *Typical Weight:* 4-8 lbs. Some arming swords are: broadsword, espée bastarde, grootzwaard, gum, jian, katana, langschwert, montante, spadone, and spatha.

Sword, Laser: This weapon uses a focused blade of laser, plasma, or some other type of energy. Such blades are often able to cut through all but the most durable or specialized forms of matter, making most armor completely ineffectual. A laser sword can ignore up to 4 points of Armor in a target and inflicts its weapon die in Wound damage on any object used for blocking actions. *Typical Weight:* 1-2 lbs.

Sword, Dueling: A dueling sword has a long, thin, flexible blade. They tend to be piercing weapons over slashing ones. *Typical Weight:* 2-3 lbs. Some dueling weapons are: rapier, smallsword, and sword-canes.

Sword, Scimitar: A scimitar is a curve-bladed sword. *Typical Weight:* 3-5 lbs. Some scimitars are: cutlass, da haun dao, falchion, kastane, kora, parang, saber, saif, tulwar, and yataghan.

Sword, Short: The short-sword is a one-handed weapon that sizes between the shorter dagger and the longer bladed broadswords, arming swords, and greatswords. *Typical Weight:* 2-3 lbs. Some short-swords are: barong, butterfly sword, choora, cinquedea, dan sang gum, duan jian, drusus, gladius, katzbalger, kris, wakazashi, and zafar takieh.

Sword, Two-Handed: Two-handed swords, or greatswords, are long bladed swords that take two hands to use, unlike the arming or short sword which can use either one- or two-hands. *Typical Weight:* 8-12 lbs. Some two-handed swords are: claidheamn mòr (claymore), dalwel, flamberge, greatsword, khandar, no-dachi, oakeshott, tachi, and zweihander.

Firearm Ammunition

Standard Rounds: The typical bullet or round that is used in a firearm.

Armor-Piercing Rounds: These rounds are high-velocity and punch through most protective measures fairly easily. AP rounds ignore the first 3 points of an object's Armor Rating, but due to over penetration the damage of the weapon is deceased by –1 step.

Hollow-Point Rounds: These rounds create huge wound cavities in their targets. Increase the damage of a weapon by +2 steps. However, armor is more effective against hollow-point bullets; double the Armor Rating of any worn armor or barrier that the target is protected by.

Non-Lethal Rounds: Non-leathal rounds are made of wood or rubber. While they still cause terrible wounds and may still kill someone shot in the head, they are less likely to do so. The weapon damage of a non-lethal round is Stun.

Arrows, Bolts, & Darts

Arrows are used for bows, bolts for crossbows. They are typically made of wood, plastic or alloys and can be loaded with a variety of tips. Darts are usually small and loaded into spring-loaded or pneumatic weapons.

Blunt: These are meant to subdue a target; they cause Stun damage when they hit.

Explosive: These rounds contain a small explosive charge. They have 2/3 the normal range, due to the weight, but cause an explosion that varies depending on the charge (starting as low as 2d4 and going as high as the Game Master decrees in a futuristic setting where heavy explosives can be quite small).

Flight: These are made to be even more aerodynamic than standard arrows or bolts, and so they have a greater range, adding 1/3 the range to the bow's range increment value.

Signal: These are tipped with a noise-making device. They are used to alert others, and are not meant for combat so much. They are –1 Skill step to attack with in combat, and damage is also –1 step.

Unique Ammunition

Grapple Lines: When fired from a crossbow or gun (usually pneumatic, but sometimes from a standard firearm), this ammunition is a grapple hook with a rope attached that projects the hook far beyond the typical human range to throw such a device. As the grapple hook ascends, the rope trails after, when the momentum dies, the operator simply pulls the rope back until the hook catches on something. Futuristic settings, such as a space opera, might have magnetic grapplers, that have ultra-thin lines and guns that can be held onto and mechanically ascend the line.

Weapon Accessories

Holsters

Holsters are designed to secure something, usually a handgun, but in the modern era mobile phones, PDAs, and tool packs have holsters also. There are several types of holster for handguns:

Shoulder: This holster is worn so that the handgun is tucked under the arm of the bearer. Spotting such weapons can be a bit more difficult, granting a +1 step in the concealment of the weapon.

Standard/Duty: A typical holster, worn on the belt.

Speed/Sport: This holster is meant for a weapon to be quickly drawn. With an Average Agility + Guns action the wearer can draw a weapon as a free action.

Stealth: It's much harder to detect these weapons, giving the wearer a +3 Skill step bonus to avoid the weapon's detection. It takes a full turn to draw a weapon hidden like this, however.

Tactical: These holsters secure the weapon from unwanted handling. Often used by law enforcement, these weapons impose a –3 Skill step to any actions taken by opponents to disarm the bearer of his weapon.

Weapon Sight Systems

These systems are scopes or pointers that aid in targeting an attack. While they are primarily used for firearms, they could be added to crossbows and possibly even bows.

Day/Night System: This scope system accommodates two uses, one for day and the other with a night-vision system, allowing the weapon to be used at night. The standard magnification for the telescope is 6x.

Laser: A laser pointer mounted on a firearm grants a +1 Skill step when at least one turn is spent aiming.

Night Vision: By increasing ambient light, this sight reduces the penalties for use in dim or dark conditions. All such penalties are halved, rounding down.

Telescopic: This lets an attacker ignore a number of range increments when attacking at range. Pistols can't support a scope above 6x. If a rifle has a 12x scope on it

Table 4.5: Scope Magnification

Magnification	Range Increment Increase
2x	2x
6x	3x
12x	4x
24x	5x
32x	6x

and its normal range Increment value is 400 feet, then its new range increment value is 1,600 feet. Refer to the table to determine the Range Increment value modifier.

Thermal Scope: This permits an object to be discerned and targeted by its temperature. While this negates penalties for darkness, fog, or other extreme weather or environment (such as covering yourself in mud to hide your body heat from a alien hunter) can either enhance or obfuscate such technology. Some modern fatigues are designed with a special technology that aids in breaking up the "thermal silhouette" of a person.

Other Attachments

Illuminator: This is a small, standard flashlight mounted on a firearm that frees one of the hands of the weapon's operator.

Silencer: Silencers don't eliminate the sound of a firearm completely, but they can soften the sound. It is Hard to detect the sounds of a silenced firearm firing more than ten yards away, and Formidable to identify the location or direction of the shooter.

Explosives & Incendiary Weapons

Acid Flask: This is a small glass container which is meant to be hurled at an opponent. The glass breaks and the acid is released. The strength of the damage depends upon the toxicity of the acid. 2d4 is typical, but 1d2 to 2d12 is certainly possible. Higher damage should be much harder to obtain. Acid damage does damage the following rounds, reduce the number of dice each turn until there are no more dice to roll. Acid damage is treated as Fire damage for the purpose of healing.

C-4: C-4 is a very stable composite explosive. C-4 is also easily traced by its chemical composition. The fact that it can be molded and shaped is a major advantage of working with C-4, as it can be made to fit into tight oddly shaped locations. In order to destroy an eight inch square steel beam, it takes about five pounds of C-4.

Dynamite: Dynamite is commonly sold in sticks (sometimes called "redmen" due to the red wax paper that they are wrapped in) eight inches long and about an inch in diameter. It is used heavily in the construction trade and, of course, in warfare. Dynamite can be unstable, especially as it ages, and can become inert if frozen.

Flamethrower: These weapons direct flaming propellant into a given area. Targets hit by a flamethrower catch fire, and will continue to burn for d6 W each round until they are put out or consumed by the flames. Flamethrowers have a 5-10 ammo value and usually a two-part weapon system. The first is the firing mechanism/trigger housing; the other is a large canister, which is worn on the back. The canister is vulnerable to

Table 4.6: Explosive Weapon Table

Weapon	Damage	Blast Radius	Range Increment	Weight
Acid Flask	2d4 W Fire	1	Strength x 3	1
C-4	3d12 W (pound)	10		1
Dynamite	3d6 W (stick)	5	Strength x 3	
Flamethrower	2d4 W Fire		15	50
Greek Fire	2d4 W Fire	2	Strength x 2	2
Grenade, Concussion	4d6 B	8	Strength x 3	1
Grenade, EMP	Special	5	Strength x 3	1
Grenade, Flash-Bang	D4 S	15	Strength x 3	1
Grenade, Fragmentation	5d6 W	30	Strength x 3	1
Grenade, Smoke	D2 S	20	Strength x 3	1.5
Grenade, Tangler	Special	3	Strength x 3	2
Grenade, Tear Gas/Riot	Special	25	Strength x 3	1.5
Grenade, White Phosphorus	4d10 W	3	Strength x 3	2
Grenade Launcher	Varies	Varies	50	4-8

attack, with an Armor Rating of 2 and 8 Life Points. If breached, the canister explodes in a three foot increment blast radius, inflicting d10 W per ammo value remaining in the weapon.

Grenades: Grenades may be thrown or fired from launchers, depending on the design. If they're thrown, they typically feature a pin or other means of activating the charge on the grenade. Launchers pull this pin automatically and insure a good distance between the attacker and his intended target area. Several varieties of grenade exist, as follows.

Concussion: This antipersonnel grenade harms those in its blast radius with the sheer concussive power of its explosion.

EMP: Electromagnetic pulse grenades are used to take out electronic systems, such as robots, cybernetics, droids, as well as advanced sensors or communications equipment. A product of a futuristic setting, EMP grenades are activated in the same way as grenades.

Flash-Bang: Flash-bang, stun, or NFDDs (Noise and Flash Diversionary Devices) grenades temporarily stun an opponent with a combination of intense light and sound, through overstimulation of the senses. When hit by a stunning weapon, the target takes Stun (usually 2d6) and must make a Formidable Resistance (Vitality + Vitality) roll. If he succeeds, he suffers a –1 Attribute step to all his attributes for d12 turns. If he fails, he's stunned (incapacitated) for d12 rounds.

Fragmentation: These antipersonnel devices are designed to fill an area with a cloud of shrapnel.

Smoke: Smoke grenades are used either for signaling or to obfuscate.

Tangler: This grenade is a futuristic device in which a mass of webbing and netting fills an area, seeking to secure anything within its effective radius, which is about eight feet. If the target is caught within the affected area, he finds it Hard to break free—or even more difficult if the Game Master so decides. Trying to take any physical actions while held should suffer a –1 to –4 Attribute step penalty, if the action is possible at all.

Tear Gas/Riot: Gas grenades are used to control or disperse large groups, or to force a target from cover. The gas causes extreme irritation to the skin, eyes, nose, and throat, and can incapacitate someone if they are exposed long enough. The cloud of gas remains effective for five minutes. When entering or initially exposed to the gas, characters suffer 1d4 Stun damage, every turn they remain in the gas, they suffer an additional 1d4 Stun damage.

White Phosphorus: Incendiary grenades produce a heat so intense it can melt metal. The reaction does not require oxygen, which allows white phosphorus grenades to work under water or even in a vacuum.

Grenade Launcher: Grenade launchers can be stand-alone units or slung under an assault rifle's barrel. Grenades fired from a grenade launcher are designed specifically for that purpose; standard grenades aren't capable of being loaded into the launcher. A grenade launch, however, may have grenades of all the various types listed above.

Rocket Launcher, Portable: These missiles or rocket launchers are small enough to be used by a person, but inflict Large Scale (perhaps even Massive Scale, if determined by the Game Master) damage.

Transportation

Mounts

Mounts can be boon companions for any adventurer, whether it is the loyal steed of a cowboy out on the range, the magical unicorn of a pure hearted maiden, or the giant eagle of a wizard. You'll find a number of creatures in **Chapter 9: Allies and Adversaries,** complete with game statistics, which may be used as mounts.

Vehicles & Ships

Cars, planes, boats, and spacehips are a bit like people. Some are nimble while others are cumbersome, and some are tough while others are fragile. Some even have a certain level of intelligence (auto-navigation, for instance) or Alertness (sensors, security systems, etc.). This is why vehicles and the like are represented in the same way as characters. Just adjust your thinking to match the ideas below and go from there. Since some less-sophisticated examples may not have actual scores in an Attribute, they cannot make use of any actions that require them (though a skilled driver, pilot, or operator can use their own).

Agility represents a vehicle or ship's maneuverability.

Strength represents the size of a vehicle or ship and its resistance to damage.

Vitality represents the vehicle or ship's repair and maintenance status.

Alertness represents the range and resolution of a vehicle or ship's sensors and communications equipment. Most civilian vehicles won't have this.

Intelligence relates to the ship's computer technology. Virtually all spaceships (and most modern sea-going vessels and aircraft) have some type of autopilot—smart enough to follow simple course instructions, and keep the ship from crashing during routine operations, but in no way self-aware (unless it's a magical or futuristic setting in which the vechicle or ship truly has a consciousness of its own).

A Matter of Scale

Damage in the Cortex System is arranged in three scales: Personal, Large, and Massive. Likewise, Life Points, Armor Rating, and so on are also divided into the same three categories.

Personal Scale combat uses Personal Scale damage, weapons, armor, and so on. Combat between ground vehicles, small fighters, and similar craft and their weapons use Large Scale damage. Large space ships, naval vessels, and many atmospheric craft use Massive Scale damage.

The ratios of Large and Massive Scale to Personal Scale damage are given in the Damage Comparison Chart. Ten points of Personal Scale damage is equivalent to 1 point of Vehicle Scale damage; 10 points of Large Scale damage is equivalent to 1 point of Massive Scale damage. This makes it very difficult for hand weapons to inflict serious damage on vehicles or ships, and conversely makes it extremely easy for Vehicles or Ships to obliterate individual, unprotected people. One point of Massive Scale damage would do 100 points of damage to a Personal Scale character!

Keep in mind that some creatures (and even characters, in unusual games) might deal Large Scale or Massive Scale damage: huge dragons, giants, enormous robots, and the like. However, Game Masters should be wary of introducing this in non-vehicles and non-ships unless the creatures will usually be fighting others of their own Scale!

Damage Comparison Chart

1 Point of ...	Equals [X] Points of Personal Scale Damage
Personal Scale Damage	1
Large Scale Damage	10
Massive Scale Damage	100

Willpower represents the redundancy and safety margins built into a vehicle or ship's design. This measures the craft's ability to operate despite damage, and a measure of how far a craft can be pushed beyond her design limits.

When calculating a vehicle's Life Points, use Strength and Willpower.

Speed is not necessarily a measure of a vehicle or ship's top speed, but rather an abstract number that reflects how maneuverable it is during combat. Speed Class 0 is extremely slow and cumbersome for close maneuvers, while highly agile zero-gravity fighters might be Speed 8 out in the vacuum of space. See **Chapter 5: Rules** for information on how Speed works in vehicle and ship combat.

Each vehicle entry also includes notes on Traits, Skills, Armaments, Armor, and so forth. If a vehicle does not have anything for one of these categories (e.g. no Traits, or no Armor), that category is left out of the entry.

Air Vehicles

Fighter Aircraft (World War II era)

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d6;
Init d6+d0 **LP** 14; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 3
Armaments Heavy machine guns (Large Scale)
Armor Wound 1, Stun 1
Description 37 x 32 x 13 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 0
Range 1,000 miles
Ceiling 35,000 feet

Bi-Plane

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d4 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d4;
Init d6 + d0; **LP** 10; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 2
Armaments Twin Light Machine Guns (Large Scale)
Armor Stun 1
Description 24 x 18 x 9 Feet
Crew 1
Passengers 1
Range 400 miles
Ceiling 12,000 feet

Attack Helicopter

Agi d8 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d6 **Int** d4 **Wil** d6;
Init d6+d6; **LP** 14; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 3
Skills Perception d8, Pilot d4
Armaments Heavy Machine gun (Large Scale), 10 Medium Missiles (Large Scale), 32 Light Missiles (Large Scale)
Armor Wound 2, Stun 3

Description 60 x 9 x 17 feet
Crew 2
Passengers 0
Range 300 miles
Ceiling 20,000 feet

Notes Defense Countermeasures (+2 Skill steps to defense actions; 6 uses), Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Environment Safety, Secure Communications Package, Sensor Package: Infrared/Global/Low-Light/Radar (+3 Skill steps to Perception-based actions when applicable).

Helicopter, Passenger

Agi d6 **Str** d4 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d2 **Int** d2 **Wil** d4;
Init d6+d2; **LP** 8; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 3

Skills Perception d6, Pilot d4

Armor Wound 1, Stun 2

Description 58 x 9 x 14 feet
Crew 1–2
Passengers 6
Range 350 miles
Ceiling 10,000 feet

Notes Communications Package, Sensor Package: Global/Radar (+1 Skill step to Perception-based actions when applicable).

Helicopter, Transport

Agi d6 **Str** d10 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d2 **Int** d2 **Wil** d4;
Init d6+d2; **LP** 8; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 3

Skills Perception d6, Pilot d4

Armor Wound 1, Stun 2

Description 60 x 19 x 15 feet
Crew 4
Passengers 32
Range 115 miles
Ceiling 8,500 feet
Cargo Capacity 3.5 tons

Notes Communications Package, Sensor Package: Global/Radar (+1 Skill step to Perception-based actions when applicable)

Hover-Chariot

Agi d6 **Str** d4 **Vit** d2 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d4;
Init d6+d0; **LP** 8; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 3

Description 8 x 6 x 5 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 1
Range 600 miles
Ceiling 500 feet

Jet, Cargo

Agi d6 **Str** d10 **Vit** d10 **Ale** d4 **Int** d4 **Wil** d8;
Init d6+d4; **LP** 18; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 3

Skills Perception d4, Pilot d4

Armor Wound 2, Stun 2

Vehicle Stat Block Example

[1] Space Shuttle *Dauntless*

[2] Agi d2 **Str** d4 **Vit** d4 **Ale** d4 **Int** d4 **Wil** d6;
[3]Init d2+d4; **LP** 12; **[4]Scale** Massive;
[5]Speed 3

[6]Traits Tough d4

[7]Skills Perception d4, Pilot d4

[8]Armaments None

[9]Armor Wound 1, Stun 2

[10]Description 122 x 78 x 58 feet
Crew 2
Passengers 11
Range 1,200
Ceiling 600 miles

1. Vehicle Name and/or Type
2. Attributes (Agility, Strength, Vitality, Alertness, Intelligence, Willpower)
3. Initiative and Life Points (Life Points are calculated from Strength + Willpower for Vehicles)
4. Scale (Personal, Large, or Massive)
5. Speed Class (Speed capacity during combat and close maneuvers.)
6. Traits (Any Assets or Complications the vehicle or ship might possess)
7. Skills and Specialties.
8. Armament and weaponry, if any, including scale notation.
9. Armor against Wound and/or Stun damage.
10. Vehicle dimensions (length x breadth x height), standard crew, passenger and cargo capacity, and other relevant information.

Description 220 x 68 x 240 feet
Crew 6
Passengers 0 (80 if converted)
Range 6,000 miles
Ceiling 40,000 feet
Cargo Capacity 150 tons

Notes Communications Package, Sensor Package: Global/Radar (+1 Skill steps to Perception-based actions when applicable).

Jet, Civilian (Private)

Agi d8 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d4 **Int** d4 **Wil** d6;
Init d8+d4; **LP** 12; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 3

Skills Perception d4, Pilot d4

Armor Wound 1, Stun 1

Description 60 x 19 x 15 feet
Crew 1–2
Passengers 8
Range 2,000 miles
Ceiling 50,000 feet
Cargo Capacity 3,000 pounds
Notes Communications Package, Sensor Package: Global/Radar (+1 Skill step to Perception-based actions when applicable).

Jet, Fighter

Agi d8 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d4 **Int** d2 **Wil** d6; **Init** d8+d4; **LP** 14; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 5
Skills Heavy Weapons d4, Perception d4, Pilot d4
Armaments Heavy Machine gun (Large Scale), 4 Medium Missiles (Large Scale), 2 Heavy "Smart" Bombs (Massive Scale)
Armor Wound 2, Stun 2
Description 50 x 32 x 16 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 0
Range 500 miles
Ceiling 60,000 feet
Notes Defense Countermeasures/ECM System (+2 Skill steps to defense actions; 6 uses), Secure Communications Package, Sensor Package: Infrared/Global/Low-Light/Radar (+2 Skill steps to Perception-based actions when applicable).

Jet Pack/Rocket Pack

Agi d6 **Str** d2 **Vit** d2 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d2; **Init** d6+d0; **LP** 4; **Scale** Personal; **Speed** 1
Description 3 x 1 x 2 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 0–1
Range 200 miles
Ceiling 500 feet

VTOL Air-Car

Agi d4 **Str** d4 **Vit** d4 **Ale** d2 **Int** d2 **Wil** d4; **Init** d4+d2; **LP** 8; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 3
Skills Perception d2, Pilot d4
Armor Wound 1
Description 16 x 6 x 5 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 3
Range 325 miles
Ceiling 7,500

Zeppelin

Agi d2 **Str** d8 **Vit** d4 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d2; **Init** d2+d0; **LP** 8; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 3
Traits Fragile [d4 Complication; –2 Life Points]
Armor Stun 1
Description 600 x 80 x 95 feet
Crew 30
Passengers 90
Range 1,200 miles
Ceiling 17,000 feet
Cargo Capacity 50 tons

Land Vehicles

Ambulance

Agi d4 **Str** d6 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d6; **Init** d6+d0; **LP** 14; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 2
Traits Toughness d4
Armor Wound 1, Stun 1
Description 18 x 10 x 10 feet
Crew 1–3
Passengers 1–3
Range 300 miles
Notes Emergency Medical Systems (+1 Skill Step to medical-based rolls).

Compact Car

Agi d6 **Str** d4 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d6; **Init** d6+d0; **LP** 10; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 2
Armor Stun 1
Description 8 x 6 x 5 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 1–3
Range 500 miles

Coupe

Agi d4 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d6; **Init** d4+d0; **LP** 12; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 3
Armor Wound 1
Description 10 x 6 x 5 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 1–3
Range 400 miles

Hover Scout Bike

Agi d8 **Str** d2 **Vit** d4 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d4; **Init** d8+d0; **LP** 6; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 3
Armaments 1 Laser Weapon (Personal Scale)
Armor Stun 1
Description 8 x 3 x 3 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 1
Range 900 miles
Ceiling 50 feet
Cargo Capacity 3.5 tons

Humvee (Military)

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d8;
Init d6+d0; **LP** 16; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 2
Armaments 1 Heavy Machine gun (Personal Scale)
Armor Wound 2, Stun 2
Description 11 x 5 x 6 feet
Crew 1–2
Passengers 4
Range 350 miles

Minivan

Agi d4 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d6;
Init d4+d0; **LP** 12; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 2
Armor Wound 1
Description 12 x 6 x 6 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 7
Range 450 miles

Motorcycle

Agi d6 **Str** d2 **Vit** d4 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d4;
Init d6+d0; **LP** 6; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 3
Description 7 x 2.5 x 4 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 1
Range 185 miles

Pick-Up Truck

Agi d4 **Str** d8 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d6;
Init d4+d0; **LP** 14; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 2
Armor Wound 1
Description 10 x 6 x 7 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 3
Range 500 miles

Police Cruiser

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d6;
Init d6+d0; **LP** 12; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 3
Armor Wound 1, Stun 1
Description 9 x 6 x 5 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 3
Range 500 miles
Notes Emergency Audio/Visual System, Law Enforcement Communications System, Law Enforcement Gear (first–aid, weapons, etc.).

Vehicle Traits

While not strictly necessary, a Game Master may decide that it's fun to add some flavor by allowing a vehicle or ship to have traits of its own. This is especially good for the iconic rides of the player characters or a memorable villain. At the Game Master's discretion, existing traits can be applied directly to vehicles, and he is encouraged to create traits specific to vehicles. Here are a few examples.

Fast Throttle (d2–d6 Asset)

This ride is ready to spring into action and somehow speeds up faster than it really should. Add the trait die to any action that requires acceleration or a sudden burst of speed.

Fuel Efficient (d4 Asset)

Through effective design or just dumb luck, this vehicle or ship doesn't burn through fuel as quickly as most of the same type. A full fuel supply will last 25% longer than normal.

Gas Guzzler (d4 Complication)

Economical is not the best word to describe this particular specimen. This vehicle or ship will go through fuel 25% faster than normal.

Slow Throttle (d2-d6 Complication)

Its top speed is just fine, it just takes a little longer to get there. Add the trait die to the difficulty of any action that requires acceleration or a sudden burst of speed.

Recreation Vehicle (RV)

Agi d2 **Str** d8 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d8;
Init d2+d0; **LP** 16; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 1
Armor Wound 1
Description 30 x 8 x 10 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 8
Range 350 miles

Snow-Cat

Agi d2 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d4;
Init d2+d0; **LP** 10; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 1
Armor Stun 2
Description 10 x 6 x 7 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 3
Range 600 miles
Notes Communication System, Emergency Arctic Survival/Medical Gear

Snowmobile

Agi d4 **Str** d2 **Vit** d4 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d4;
Init d4+d0; **LP** 6; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 2
Armor Stun 1
Description 7 x 2.5 x 3 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 1
Range 150 miles

Sports Car

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d4 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d6;
Init d6+d0; **LP** 10; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 3
Armor Stun 1
Description 8 x 5 x 4 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 1
Range 225 miles

SUV

Agi d4 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d8;
Init d4+d0; **LP** 14; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 2
Armor Wound 1
Description 11 x 5 x 6 feet
Crew 1–2
Passengers 4
Range 250 miles

SWAT Van

Agi d2 **Str** d8 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d6;
Init d2+d0; **LP** 14; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 2
Armor Wound 1, Stun 2
Description 12 x 7 x 9 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 8
Range 350 miles
Notes Law Enforcement Communications, SWAT Armor/Weapons Cache, Tactical Equipment.

Tank

Agi d2 **Str** d12 **Vit** d12 **Ale** d2 **Int** d0 **Wil** d12; **Init** d2+d2; **LP** 24; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 1
Skills Perception d2
Armaments 2 Heavy Machine guns (Personal Scale), Tank Gun (40 Rounds, Large Scale)
Armor Wound 6, Stun 4
Description 32 x 11 x 9 feet
Crew 4
Passengers 4
Range 260 miles
Notes Battle Management System (+d4 find/identify targets), Chobham Armor, NBC Environment Safety, Secure Communications Package, Sensor Package: Infrared/Global/Low-Light/Radar (+d4 Perception actions), Smoke Screen Decoy System (light concealment defense bonus).

Sea Vehicles

Aircraft Carrier, Nuclear

Agi d0 **Str** d12+d2 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d4 **Int** d6 **Wil** d10;
Init d0+d4; **LP** 24; **Scale** Massive; **Speed** 1
Traits Formidable Presence d4
Skills Heavy Weapons d4, Mechanical Engineering d4, Perception d4, Pilot d4
Armaments 6 Heavy Machine guns (Large Scale), 30 Heavy Missiles (Large Scale)
Armor Wound 5, Stun 8
Description 60 x 19 x 15 feet
Crew 50
Passengers 5,500
Range Unlimited (Nuclear)
Notes Battle Management System (+2 Skill steps when using the targeting system and an aim action), Secure Global Communications Package, Sensor Package: Infrared/Global/Low-Light/Radar (+2 Skill steps to Perception-based actions when applicable), ECM Countermeasures; **Aircraft Compliment** 48 Jet Fighters, 4 Long Range Reconnaissance/Surveillance Planes, 4 Anti-Submarine Aircraft, 12 Supply Aircraft, 6 Helicopters.

Chinese Junk

Agi d0 **Str** d4 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d4;
Init d0+d0; **LP** 8; **Scale** Massive; **Speed** 1
Armaments 6 Swivel-Mount Black-Powder Guns (Personal Scale)
Armor Wound 2, Stun 2
Description 125 x 75 x 110 feet
Crew 50
Passengers 100

Galleon

Agi d0 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d4;
Init d6+d0; **LP** 10; **Scale** Massive; **Speed** 1
Armaments 9 Swivel-Mount Black-Powder Guns (Personal Scale), 32 Black-Powder Cannons (Large Scale)
Armor Wound 2, Stun 3
Description 60 x 19 x 15 feet
Crew 60
Passengers 140

Jet Ski

Agi d4 **Str** d2 **Vit** d2 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d2;
Init d4+d0; **LP** 4; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 1
Description 5 x 2.5 x 2.5 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 1–2
Range 50 miles

Marine Interceptor

Agi d4 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d2 **Int** d0 **Wil** d6;
Init d4+d2; **LP** 12; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 2
Armaments 4 Heavy Machine guns (Personal Scale), 1 Light Machine gun (Large Scale)
Armor Wound 2, Stun 2
Description 35 x 10 x 8 feet
Crew 5
Passengers 16
Range 700 miles

Minisub

Agi d0 **Str** d4 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d2 **Int** d0 **Wil** d6;
Init d0+d2; **LP** 10; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 1
Armor Wound 2, Stun 2
Description 18 x 8 x 8 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 2
Range 90 miles

Submarine, Nuclear

Agi d0 **Str** d10 **Vit** d10 **Ale** d4 **Int** d4 **Wil** d8;
Init d0+d4; **LP** 18; **Scale** Massive; **Speed** 1
Skills Heavy Weapons d4, Mechanical Engineering d4, Perception d4, Pilot d4
Armaments Medium Torpedo (Massive Scale), 24 Ballistic Nuclear Missiles (Massive Scale)
Armor Wound 3, Stun 6
Description 560 x 76 x 36 feet
Crew 120
Passengers 20
Range Unlimited (Nuclear Powered)
Notes Communications Suite, Defense Countermeasures (+d4 to Dodge), ECM, Escape Pods, Sensors Package: Global/Infrared/Low-Light/Radar/Sonar (+2 Skill steps to Perception-based actions when applicable), Stealth System (+2 Skill step to Covert/Stealth actions when applicable), Underwater Communications Suite.

Speed Boat

Agi d4 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d4;
Init d4+d0; **LP** 10; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 3
Armor Wound 1, Stun 1
Description 25 x 10 x 8 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 1
Range 250 miles

Zodiac

Agi d4 **Str** d4 **Vit** d2 **Ale** d0 **Int** d0 **Wil** d2;
Init d4+d0; **LP** 4; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 1
Description 12 x 6 x 3 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 8
Range 50 miles

Space Vehicles

Colony Ship

Agi d2 **Str** d10 **Vit** d12 **Ale** d6 **Int** d4 **Wil** d8;
Init d2+d6; **LP** 18; **Scale** Massive; **Speed** 5
Skills Heavy Weapons d4, Mechanical Engineering d6, Perception d4, Pilot d6
Armaments 12 Dual-Linked Medium Lasers (Large Scale), 10 Long Range Heavy Missiles (Massive Scale)
Armor Wound 3, Stun 5
Description 4,000 x 1,000 x 800 feet;
Crew 400;
Passengers 2,000
Notes Starfighter Compliment (20)

Corvette

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d6 **Int** d4 **Wil** d6;
Init d6+d6; **LP** 14; **Scale** Massive; **Speed** 6
Skills Heavy Weapons d4, Mechanical Engineering d6, Perception d6, Pilot d6
Armaments 4 Linked Medium Lasers (Large Scale), 20 Long Range Heavy Missiles (Massive Scale)
Armor Wound 3, Stun 3
Description 300 x 100 x 75 feet;
Crew 16;
Passengers 32

Fast Freighter

Agi d8 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d6 **Int** d4 **Wil** d4;
Init d8+d6; **LP** 10; **Scale** Massive; **Speed** 7
Skills Heavy Weapons d4, Mechanical Engineering d4, Perception d4, Pilot d6
Armaments Linked Heavy Lasers (Large Scale)
Armor Wound 2, Stun 2
Description 110 x 50 x 40 feet
Crew 4
Passengers 4

Fleet Carrier

Agi d4 **Str** d10 **Vit** d12 **Ale** d6 **Int** d6 **Wil** d10;
Init d4+d6; **LP** 20; **Scale** Massive; **Speed** 5
Skills Heavy Weapons d6, Mechanical Engineering d4, Perception d6, Pilot d6
Armaments 6 Dual-Linked Heavy Lasers (Large Scale), 10 Long Range Heavy Missiles (Massive Scale)
Armor Wound 4, Stun 6

Description 1,500 x 800 x 300 feet
Crew 350
Passengers 100
Fighter Craft Compliment 36 Fighters, 12 Bombers, 4 Reconnaissance/Surveillance craft, 12 Supply craft

Orbital "Space Shuttle"

Agi d2 **Str** d4 **Vit** d4 **Ale** d4 **Int** d4 **Wil** d6;
Init d2+d4; **LP** 10; **Scale** Massive; **Speed** 3
Skills Perception d4, Pilot d4
Armor Wound 1, Stun 2
Description 122 x 78 x 58 feet
Crew 2
Passengers 11
Range 1,200
Ceiling 600 miles

Scout Starship

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d4 **Wil** d6;
Init d6+d8; **LP** 12; **Scale** Massive; **Speed** 6
Skills Heavy Weapons d4, Mechanical Engineering d4, Perception d8, Pilot d6
Armaments Linked Heavy Lasers (Large Scale)
Armor Wound 1, Stun 2
Description 150 x 40 x 60 feet
Crew 6
Passengers 8

Snub-Nose Starfighter

Agi d10 **Str** d6 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d6 **Wil** d6;
Init d10+d8; **LP** 12; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 8 (5 Atmospheric)
Skills Perception d6, Pilot d6
Armaments Linked Medium Lasers (Large Scale), Short Range Light Missiles (Large Scale)
Armor Wound 4, Stun 4
Description 33 x 10 x 16 feet
Crew 1
Passengers 0

Vehicle & Ship Weapons

A cannon is roughly the large equivalent of a hand-held gun. In game terms, the two work the same way except for the scale on which they operate. It makes life easier when two Massive battleships are firing at each other, because it makes it only a little different than two characters engaged in shootout (in terms of rules, bookkeeping, and gameplay).

Note that the weapons listed are just examples that can and should be modified to fit specific models and individual ships and vehicles. Weapons can exist on any scale, with the Game Master modifying things such as range and blast increment (for explosives) accordingly. Note that energy weapons can sometimes be adjusted to be either lethal or non-lethal, inflicting either Wound or Stun.

Extraordinary Items

Magic & Superscience

Arthur C. Clarke proposed that any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. The ability to take a picture with a handheld device (modern cell phone) and transmit it to others would amaze a 17th century American colonist, just as the ability to kill someone by squeezing the trigger on a 9 mm would terrify and astound an ancient Babylonian warrior.

Many things in this game have very similar game effects. For example, a pistol and a sword might both inflict d6 Wound—but the descriptive and story elements that go with it are highly different. This allows players and the Game Master to come up with a

Table 4.7: Vehicle Weapons

Weapon	Damage	Blast Increment	Range Increment
Cannon, Light	D8 W	—	800
Cannon, Medium	D10 W	—	1,500
Cannon, Heavy	D12 W	—	3,000
Laser, Light	D4 W	—	3,000
Laser, Medium	D8 W	—	9,000
Laser, Heavy	D12 W		18,000
Machine Gun, Heavy	D4 W	—	500
Missiles, Light	2D10 W	50	—
Missiles, Medium	4D10 W	100	—
Missiles, Heavy	6D10 W	500	—

These weapons are all assumed to be Large scale, though variations of them may also exist on both the Personal and Massive Scale as well.

variety of unusual weapons, items, and other gear that can be highly unusual but use familiar game rules and terminology.

An alien hunter might have a gauntlet that bends light around him, making him invisible—while a thief in a fantasy setting might have himself an enchanted cloak that renders her invisible when the hood is drawn up.

Robotic Devices

Robotic devices are artifically created to serve a purpose or function of some kind for their creators. In many settings, they have some degree of intelligence (and possibly self-awareness) depending on the nature of their programming and the place that artificial life has in the world the Game Master is trying to convey. But robots are not limited to futuristic settings. An alternate history might include droid-soldiers from recovered alien technology; a fantasy setting might include sophisticated "golems" that fill the same role as robots; a Victorian steampunk setting might include clockwork automatons.

Robotic devices need not be humanoid. A war-droid could look like a spider, or an advanced crime fighting unit in a modern setting could look like a 1982 Pontiac Trans Am, while a maintenance 'bot could resemble a beeping trash can on legs.

Robotic Traits

Artifical life can be generally assumed to have the following traits, specifics adusted by the Game Master: Constructed d8, Immunity d8, Unnatural Healing d6, Duty (based on purpose or programming) d8, Nonhealing d8. Some might have Eerie Presence or Honest to a Fault or other quirks.

Drones

Drones are not so much robots as tools; a given drone is an extension of a person controlling the device, usually at some distance. Modern day police and military use drones to deal with explosives. The military uses them to scout and deliver weapon payloads without the risk of loss of human life on their side. For all intents and purposes, drones are more like remotely-operated vehicles than true robots.

Bomb Disposal Drone

Agi d2 **Str** d8 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d2 **Int** d2 **Wil** d4;
Init d2+d2; **LP** 10; **Scale** Personal; **Speed** 2
Skills Mechanical Engineering d4, Perception d4
Armor Wound 3, Stun 2
Description 6 x 4 x 4 feet
Crew 1 (Remote Assisted)
Range 4 miles
Notes Ordinance Disposal Tools, Sensor Package, Video System.

Starship Repair Drone

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d4 **Int** d6 **Wil** d4;
Init d6+d4; **LP** 12; **Scale** Personal; **Speed** 4
Skills Mechanical Engineering d6/Mechanical Repair d8, Perception d6, Technical Engineering d6
Armor Wound 3, Stun 2
Description 8 x 6 x 4 feet
Notes Mechanical/Repair tools, Sensor Package, Video System

UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle)

Agi d6 **Str** d10 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d4 **Int** d2 **Wil** d6;
Init d6+d4; **LP** 16; **Scale** Large; **Speed** 5
Skills Heavy Weapons d6, Perception d4
Armaments 4 Medium Missiles (Large Scale)
Armor Wound 4, Stun 2
Description 27 x 48 x 10 feet
Crew 1 (Remote Operator)
Range 450 miles
Ceiling 26,000 ft.
Notes Secure Communications Package, Sensor Package: Infrared/Global/Low-Light/Radar.

Robots

Robots are often limited in what they can do, though in some settings they may be highly advanced and self-aware. An example of a simple robot might be a small contraption that is pre-programmed to go about the house, vacuuming the floor. If it bumps into something, it simply maneuvers its way around until it returns back to its charging port. More complex robots have been sent to the ocean floor and to Mars. A sci-fi robot might be a dog that includes sensors, a master chess-playing program, and has a laser on its nose.

Cargo-Loading Heavy'Bot

Agi d4 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d2 **Int** d4 **Wil** d8;
Init d4+d2; **LP** 16; **Scale** Large
Skills Athletics d6/Lifting d12+d4, Perception d6/Store Cargo d10
Description 12 x 9 x 18 feet
Range 1 mile;

Spider War-Bot

Agi d8 **Str** d8 **Vit** d12 **Int** d6 **Ale** d6 **Wil** d6;
Init d8+d6; **LP** 14; **Scale**: Vehicle; **Speed** 3
Traits Crude d4, Enhanced Manipulation d10, Intimidating d6
Skills Athletics d6/Climbing d10, Covert d6/Ambush d8, Heavy Weapons d6/Weapon Systems d12, Perception d6/Scan d8/Search d8/Track d10, Survival d6, Unarmed Combat d6
Armament 2 Light Lasers (Personal Scale), 1 Medium Laser (Large Scale)

Robotic Characters

With your Game Master's approval, you can make robot characters using the standard character generation process.

In the case of Attributes, Intelligence must be extremely advanced programming or a technologically evolved self-awareness to make it playable. Skills are usually the result of programming, but a self-aware robot may acquire further Skills given time and exposure to training. It's possible that new Skills are as simple as uploading a new program, though for the purposes of gameplay this should be the explanation for character advancement, not something the robot player character can do on a whim.

As far as Traits are concerned, most may be modified to fit the theme of the robot. A robot with Anger Issues might simply have been programmed with a bad attitude, or it could be crossed wires. A robot with Enhanced Senses probably has an advanced sensor system of some type.

Robotic characters are often more resistant to the environment. They do not need to eat (though they might need to plug into a power supply) and do not breathe or require sleep. They may or may not be resistant to Stun damage, though a electromagnetic pulse might take them down fairly easily if they are not shielded from it. They don't heal and need to be repaired. The robot itself might carry out the repair (the equivalent of first aid), but most often a Skilled technician is required. Robots may be able to download their programming into other devices, perhaps in an effort to preserve their identities if their physical bodies are destroyed.

When calculating a robot's Life Points, use Strength and Willpower.

Armor Wound 3, Stun 2
Description 20 x 20 x 45
Range 400 miles
Notes Advanced Sensors, Armor Plating

AI Tank

Agi d4 **Str** d12 **Vit** d12 **Int** d6 **Ale** d6 **Wil** d8; **Init** d4+d6; **LP** 20; **Scale**: Vehicle; **Speed** 2
Traits Intimidating d4
Skills Heavy Weapons d6/Weapon Systems d12, Perception d6
Armament 2 Heavy Machine gun (Personal Scale), Tank Gun (40 Rounds, Large Scale)
Armor Wound 4, Stun 4
Description 35 x 16 x 9 feet
Range 400 miles;
Notes Battle Management System (+2 Skill step to target an opponent when using an aim action), Chobham Armor, NBC Environment Safety, Secure Communications Package, Sensor Package: Infrared/Global/Low-Light/Radar (+2 Skill steps to Perception-based actions when applicable), Smoke Screen Decoy System (light concealment defense bonus).

Androids & Synthetics

Androids are robots that are designed to resemble human beings, whether for practical or aesthetic reasons. The degree in which an android blends in depends on the setting. The most advanced android might have yellow eyes and pale skin in one setting, or fully resemble a human being on the outside in another. A synthetic is an artifically created person that sweats, bleeds, and cries like a regular person and might require a special DNA test to identify them as "artificial life." A cyborg incorporates both the biological and the mechanical, either as a human who has "upgraded" to cybernetic replacements or a machine that has incorporated living components for self-awareness or disguise.

Crystal Golem Wizard Guardian

Agi d4 **Str** d10 **Vit** d12 **Ale** d6 **Int** d4 **Wil** d8; **Init** d4+d6 **LP** 18;
Skills Athletics d6, Discipline d6/Intimidate d10, Influence d6, Knowledge d4, Melee Weapon Combat d6/Swords d10, Perception d6, Survival d6, Unarmed Combat d6
Arcane Regeneration Despite being a golem, the crystal guardian actually heals, with crystals reforming and strengthening damaged portions of the golem. This process occurs twice as fast as a human natural rate of healing.

Diplomatic Unit

Agi d4 **Str** d4 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d8 **Wil** d6; **Init** d4+d8 **LP** 10;
Traits Higher Education d6, Pacifist d6, Enhanced Senses d8, Honest to a Fault d4
Skills Influence d6/Bureaucracy d10/Conversation d10, Knowledge d6/Culture d10/Law d10, Medicine d4, Perception d6/Sight d8/Stress Analysis d10, Performance d2, Tech d4
Description Language Suite (More than 3 million forms of communication)

Hunter-Killer Infiltrator

Agi d10 **Str** d12 **Vit** d10 **Ale** d8 **Int** d8 **Wil** d10; **Init** d10+d8 **LP** 22;
Traits Athletic d6, Brawler d6, Infamy d8, Overconfident d8, Prejudice d4, Split-Second Timing d6, Tough d8

Skills Athletics d6/Dodge d10/Running d10, Covert d6/Sabotage d8/Stealth d8, Craft d6/Gunsmithing d10, Discipline d6/Interrogation d10, Guns d6/All d10, Heavy Weapons d6, Knowledge d4, Mechanic d6/Repair d10, Medicine d6, Melee Weapon Combat d6/Clubs d10, Perception d6/Tracking d8, Pilot d6/Aerial Craft d8/Automobiles d10, Ranged Weapons d4, Science d6/Chemical Sciences d8, Survival d6/Urban Survival d10, Unarmed Combat d6/Brawling d12

Pleasure Bot

Agi d10 **Str** d6 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d6 **Wil** d6; **Init** d10+d8 **LP** 12;

Traits Athletic d4, Memorable d4, Pacifist d6

Skills Athletics d6/Contortion d10; Discipline d6/Morale d10, Influence d6/Conversation d8/Seduction d10, Knowledge d6/Sex d10, Medicine d6/Massage d10, Perception d6

Toxins & Antidotes

Poisons present the player characters with a challenge regardless of the nature of their experience and training. Adding toxins to an encounter raises the stakes, and can be just enough of a danger that the player characters must consider their actions carefully.

Goblins might be using weapons coated in a toxin to sedate the character so that they can rob them. Giant scorpions or a huge spider might have paralyzing venom, the better to eat you alive with. An assassin might have poisoned a character's drink. However you choose to include them in the game, here are some rough guidelines on how to go about it.

There are a few things to consider when it comes to chemicals, toxins, antidotes, and poisons:

How it is being distributed? Is it from a bite attack, or a poison coated arrow? Is it from a gas attack, meaning is it inhaled? Is it a contact poison, meaning all it needs to do is touch your skin? Or is it something that must be consumed?

How long does it take to affect someone? Is it an instant effect, or does it take a few days? Another thing to consider is if it keeps attack the system, requiring multiple rolls to resist the poison possibly. Some poisons can flood a given space, so each round or minute a person is within an area can cause them to suffer an attack.

How potent is it? This has nothing so much to do with how fast a poison kills but how hard it is to resist the poison. Remember a resisted poison can still hurt you.

What does it actually do? Does it kill, paralyze, sedate, or attack the central nervous system (perhaps lowering an attribute score)? A lot of toxins will still do something to you, even if you actually do fight it off. If you have a poison that does Wound damage, for instance, resisting it might only lessen the damage type or reduce the damage die.

How can it be countered or cured? Is it a rare, unknown poison? Will a simple weed belay or stop the poison? Is a sample of the poison needed to make an antidote? Will only a magical healing spell aid the King from the assassin's vile toxin? When it comes to healing, you have to decide how hard it is to know about the poison and whether it is going to take a Simple or Complex test, which could take weeks to recover from.

Here are several poisonous examples:

Breath of the Wraith

Type: Inhaled
Effect Time: 1 turn
Resistance: 11
Effect: Success means no immediate effect, but for the next few nights they will have terrible dreams, thus getting little to no rest. (Extraordinary Success negates all effects.) Failure means the character falls unconscious immediately, and takes d2 hours to awaken from this nightmare state. If a roll is botched the "sleep of nightmares" lasts for d12 days, during this time the character gets no rest. Each day spent unconscious forces the character to attempt a Hard Resistance (Vitality + Vitality). Failure reduces one's Willpower by one step. When Willpower is completely lost, the character dies. **Healing**: A healer must succeed a Formidable action to treat the victim of the dire breath of a dreaded wraith-lord. A Healer is only allowed one roll per day.

Dementia Toxin

Type: Inhaled or Ingested
Effect Time: d12 minutes
Resistance: 15
Effect: A resistance failure results in a d4 step penalty to Intelligence, a success results in –1 step to Alertness.
Healing: Anti-toxin
Notes: Affect the memory and cognitive functions. Cannot puzzle solve, remember or concentrate.

Hard Liquor

Type: Ingested
Effect Time: 10 minutes
Resistance: 11 (+2 for each drink consumed within an hour)
Effect: –1 step to Agility and Alertness
Healing: Time is the only real way to recover from being drunk. Some advanced setting might have a "magic pill" or some other vile concoction to consume;
Notes: One Resistance roll is made for each drink. If Agility becomes d0 or lower, the character cannot move under his own power, conscious but pretty much helpless. If Alertness reaches d0 or lower, a character will lose consciousness.

Radiation Poison

Type: Contact
Effect Time: d6 turns
Resistance: 11 (+2 per minute of exposure)
Effect: Failure results in d12 B damage
Healing: 11 Difficulty, +2 Skill steps to roll if anti-radiation meds are on hand.

Deadly Snake/Spider Poison

Type: Injected
Effect Time: d8 minutes
Resistance: 11
Effect: Success results in d6 B damage, Failure d10 W, a Botch results in death if not treated within 15 minutes with antivenin.
Healing: Antivenin

Sodium Pentothal

Type: Injected
Effect Time: 5 minutes
Resistance: 15
Effect: Failure results in –2 step penalty to Willpower to resist questioning for one hour. Success or Failure, you suffer a –1 step penalty to Agility and Alertness for the duration from chemical drunkenness
Healing: Time or an anti-toxin.
Notes: If you're a real badass, you'll truthfully tell your interrogator that you're going to snap his neck and kill the guard with a truncheon right before you do it, or something to that effect.

Tranquilizer

Type: Injected
Effect Time: 1/turn for d8 turns; Resistance: 11
Effect: Unconsciousness
Healing: Anti-Toxins or Adrenalin shots
Notes: Must make a Resistance roll once per turn for d8 turns, starting at Average but with the Difficulty increasing by 1 each turn.

Magic Shop

Note that magical gear is not necessarily just for fantasy games. Magic potions, swords, and spell books may have just as much use in a modern fantasy setting or possibly even in a far futuristic or space opera setting.

As noted above, all magic items could simply be articles of advanced technology. A magic wand in a fantasy setting could be made of circuitry and crystals beneath its archaic exterior.

Here are a variety of magical items to inspire your games:

Armor

Elven Silversteel Corslet: This mail shirt, or corslet, covers the torso and upper arms. It is made of a mesh of fine elven-crafted silversteel, an alloy used only by the most talented of elven smiths. The armor weighs only five pounds, yet protects even better normal chainmail shirt (6W). It is silent, imposing no penalty to stealth actions.

Gorgon's Shield: This large circular shield is made of bronze, and it bears the trapped head of a slain medusa. Once each day, the bearer of the shield may call upon the power of the gods and bring the gorgon's visage to life. When this happens, every living thing within 20 feet that can see the gorgon's face must suceed a Formidable Resistance (Alertness + Willpower) test or be turned to stone.

King's Honor: This mystical scabbard, if worn by the true heir to the crown, aids king and country by raising a magical, invisible field around the king. This gives him an Armor Rating of 8 from all attacks, natural or magical.

Potions & Draughts

Draught of Quickness: This magical drink allows the one who quaffs it to make as many as two additional actions each turn at no penalty. At least one of the additional actions must be a non-combat action. This effect lasts for only one minute.

Elixir of Healing: These valuable elixirs relieve wounds, bringing fast health to the imbiber. The drinker immediately recovers d6 Wounds upon consuming the potion. Once all Wounds are eliminated, it eliminates Shock points and then and Stun damage.

Potion of Faces: The imbiber of this potion may alter his appearance (and voice) to match that of another person so long as he has a bit of their tissue (even hair or fingernail will do). This provides a temporary d8 bonus die to all actions to convince others of the deception. The material is dropped into the potion, which may be consumed up to a minute later. The effect lasts four hours.

Rings

Ring of Fortune's Blessing: The magic in this ring allows a player to re-roll one Endurance, Resistance, Initiative, or other Attribute + Attribute action when they spend a Plot Point for this purpose.

Ring of Quick Healing: When wearing this ring, the character receives the benefits of the Quick Healer d6 Asset.

Ring of the Hammer: Wearing this ring grants the character a d4 Basic bonus damage die to his unarmed attacks. This extra die is included regardless of what other Traits and enhancements the character possesses.

Miscellaneous Items

Gauntlets of the Giant: These heavy steel, leather and jeweled gloves enhance the raw power of the wearer, granting him a +d8 bonus die to all actions involving his Strength Attribute.

Satchel of Great Capacity: This satchel hold ten times the volume of material than it ordinarily should, and at a tenth the weight.

Tabard of Leadership: This tabard of fine quality materials and craftsmanship enhances the natural leadership and charisma of the wearer. This translates into a +d8 bonus die to any action regarding inspiration or leadership.

Rods & Staves

Iron Bane Rod: This three-foot rod appears to be made of corroded or rusted metal. When the bearer spends a Plot Point and touches the rod against an object made of at least half iron, it causes the object to rust rapidly. If the object touched is itself magical, the bearer of that object is allowed a chance to resist the rusting with a Formidable test of Willpower + Discipline (or other skill determined by the Game Master).

Staff of the Blackflame: This staff is capable of great magic. It holds five Plot Points worth of power each day that can be spent in a number of ways: With 1 Plot Point, it creates a small fire, even in the worst conditions, that burns for 8 hours; 2 Plot Points create a wall of fire 40 feet long, 1 foot deep and 10 feet tall; 3 Plot Points create a blast of fire that does d12 W damage to a single target within 50 feet if the bearer succeeds at an Agility + Ranged Weapons Discipline (or other skill determined by the Game Master) attack.

Wand of the Spider: This wand is made of black crystal with silvery veins. It has the power to shoot forth globs of sticky webbing. An attack uses Agility + Ranged Weapons (or other skill determined by the Game Master). The target can try to dodge the attack as usual. If the attack succeeds, the target is stuck fast and must succeed at a Formidable (15) Strength + Athletics action to break free on his turn. Trying to do anything while stuck incurs a –1 to –4 Attribute step, depending on the nature of the action.

Weapons

King's Sword: This blade grants the wielder a d8 bonus die to attack actions and upon an Extraordinary Success result it has a chance of removing the head of the target. The attacker must beat the target in an opposed Willpower + Discipline test, otherwise the sword does normal damage. If the attacker succeeds, the target is instantly killed.

Thunder's Reach: This bow has been enchanted with the power of lightning and thunder. Any arrow released from the bow becomes a streak of lightning, which does d10 W electrical damage.

Wyrmsdoom Spear: This spear is enchanted with the power to bring death and destruction upon dragons and other fantastic serpents. When attacking a dragon, the bearer of the spear gains a d8 bonus die to his attack action, and the spear does d12+d12 W damage. On an Extraordinary Success, the wyrm must make a Heroic Resistance (Vitality + Willpower) test or die.

Upgrading Gear

Build It Yourself

Sometimes you need a special tool for a special job—something you're not going to find at the mall, the merchant's shop, or in the supply vaults of the quartermaster. Worse yet, it may not even be on the Game Master's equipment list.

Just because something isn't mundane or listed somewhere doesn't mean your character can't get his hands on it. When this happens, simply approach your Game Master with the idea and see if it can be worked into the campaign.

Here are some guidelines for creating or adjusting equipment.

Detail It

First, you need to figure out exactly what it is you want. Describe what you want it to do and then meet with your Game Master to discuss it. The more detailed and specific you can be the better. He needs to decide if the gear is something that he'll allow in the game. If he says no, perhaps he'll be able to give you some feedback on how to rework your concept. If he says yes, then you need to work out the details.

Once you and the Game Master settle on the item, you both need to work out how your character can get it. Is it something he'll need to buy? Will he have to find someone to craft it? Does someone else already own the device and now your character has to go steal it? The acquisition of gear can be an adventure in and of itself.

Value It

Almost everything has a value. Magical potions of healing are highly prized in most every game. In a post-holocaust genre, the value of goods skyrockets as demand increases and supply diminishes. You may not be able to buy your gear with money, but a value still needs to be assigned to it.

The most appropriate way to price equipment is by comparing it to something that already has a value placed upon it. The Game Master sets a price that he thinks is fair

based on the value of comparable goods. This is known as the "base value" of the item, and in some cases, that's the final value.

Sometimes gear is a combination of multiple items. If that's the case, looking at those items and combining their prices to find the base value is possible. Beyond that, however, you must consider if the item is better than the other items. It could be smaller and more convenient, for instance. It could be more powerful. It could be made of more durable materials. If the device is better then the sum of its parts in this case, then the base value should be higher.

Improved Quality

Not all gear is created equal. Better materials, better craftsmanship, and better technology all play a part in the quality of an item. Such attention to detail brings a benefit to a character that uses it. Of course, this kind of thing is more expensive than normal. Game Masters could take an extra cost or simply multiply the base cost of an item, depending upon their game and setting. We have some suggestions for pricing items below.

As you'll notice gear upgrades are not that dissimilar to magic or super-science benefits, but within the narrative of the story it can make a big difference. A setting that has evil minions tracking magic and killing whoever possesses it means having magic is a lot more difficult, but makes well-made items very valuable. They still give some bonus without needlessly putting a character in greater danger. However, one can only get so much out of well-made gear, and magical items can easily surpass the bonuses of a quality item.

Game Masters shouldn't be afraid to deny a gear request; sometimes a piece of gear simply screws up a story. (A spraycan of ectoplasmic eliminator may ruin a ghost-hunting campaign, for example.) Just because a player wants it, doesn't make it appropriate. Some technology should not exist in some games.

Flavoring

If the improvement you want is only a single, minor change, or the modification is purely aesthetic in terms of game mechanics (a survival knife with a hollow handle containing waterproofed matches and a compass), the Game Master could add an additional 10% to the base price. This represents a very slight increase. Otherwise a Game Master could simply let it go for base price. When it comes down to it, there are things that it is just not worth wasting time and energy on.

Basic Improvements

Adding 50% to the base value of the item comes when a single basic, low-powered, but still significant bonus is desired. An example of this would be to increase to the range increment of a gun, or it might be a first aid kit with special supplies that add +1 step to the user's Medicine/ First Aid Skill actions.

Significant Improvements

Major alterations could easily add 100% or 200% of the base value. These include combining two or more important pieces of gear; miniaturizing gear by half the size; adding advanced stealth capabilities to a ship; giving a weapon +2 step to its damage die; or a +1 Skill step to attacks.

Extreme Improvements

If a piece of gear has extremely significant changes or properties, the device could easily go for five times or even 10 times the base value. Extreme miniaturization could be very costly. Gear that is virtually indestructible is another. Doubling the range of a weapon would be another extreme improvement.

Here are a number of ways that a well-made object might add a player's rolls:

Gain an additional die step. This bonus should not exceed a +1 step—usually a Skill but sometimes an Attribute. *Example:* A hand-held scanner with upgraded scanner software might give a +1 step bonus to Scientific Expertise/ Science Scanners rolls.

Gain an additional die. This bonus should usually not exceed a +d4 value and it must be limited to certain types of actions. *Example:* A camouflage poncho of such clever design might give a d2 bonus die to stealth actions.

Reduce a penalty. This benefit reduces a penalty given to the character. This bonus should not exceed a –4 to a Difficulty, but even better is to eliminate a specific game penalty. *Example:* A helmet with targeting scanners that allows the wearer to take one additional attack action without multiple action penalty.

Encumbrance factor. The item could be lighter in weight or perhaps doesn't bind or encumber the character as much. *Example:* A satchel or backpack with trim construction and snug straps.

Sub-Par Quality

And then there's the other side of the gold piece: items of inferior quality. Game Masters could and should provide "opportunities" for players to acquire inferior items. Sometimes they should be thrown at players as a challenge, sometimes players will need to seek out such gear.

The above notes on how to improve gear and modify prices can be used to downgrade gear; simply reverse the process. Another, perhaps easier solution is to provide some kind of high-profile equipment for a one-shot effort. Once it's used, it breaks or is otherwise rendered useless, preventing the same trick from being tried again. This is especially useful in games that reward ingenuity instead of repetition.

CHAPTER 5
RULES

You already got the basics of the game from **Chapter One: Game Basics**; the Cortex System is simple and flexible, so you don't really need much more to play. But there are times when the basic game mechanics don't cover something, so this chapter will guide you through it.

Here you can find more detailed rules on character action and movement, especially during intense action scenes. While these scenes are broken up into combat turns, remember that action doesn't always mean battle, and that there can be plenty of tension, drama, and danger in social or mental "combat."

Actions Revisited

Circumstances affect the chances of success. When it's smooth sailing or when you've got help, life is a little easier. When you've got a slavering alien breathing down your neck and it's raining cats and dogs, getting the job done is suddenly a bit trickier. Sometimes it also takes a lot longer to do something than just one turn, which can make life very interesting indeed. Here's how it all works.

Complex Actions

Some actions are lengthier or more involved than others. Sprinting across a room is a simple action, but running a marathon is a **complex action**. These actions call for multiple rolls. Complex actions use the same Difficulty descriptors (Easy, Hard, etc.) but the totals are five times what they were for simple action—but since you are rolling more than once and adding everything together the needed total is called a **Threshold**. Each roll of the dice represents a certain amount of time; it could be as short as a combat turn (three seconds) for something like picking a lock or as long as a month (doing a full refit and upgrade on a starship).

Table 5.1: Thresholds

Action	Threshold
Easy	15
Average	35
Hard	55
Formidable	75
Heroic	95
Incredible	115
Ridiculous	135
Impossible	155

It's important to remember the "when to roll" guidelines here. If you're picking a lock with all the time in the world it's likely that eventually you'll get through the door. If you're upgrading the starship in spacedock under no significant time crunch then it should simply happen within a reasonable amount of time. However, if an ogre is charging down the corridor with a spiked club, it suddenly becomes important to know how long it takes to get that door open. Or if a fleet of marauding aliens is making its way toward your corner of the galaxy, it's important to know whether your ship is combat-ready or not. When time is a factor, and when there is serious dramatic consequence for failure, it's time to roll the dice. Otherwise, the Game Master should just say how long a Complex action took and move on.

When performing a complex action, the Game Master decides the Threshold needed and the dice to be used in exactly the same way he decides those things for a simple action. Then he needs to decide two more things: How much game time each roll represents for your character, and if there is a time limit that restricts the number of rolls you can make. Otherwise, you keep rolling and track your total and how much time has passed. You can keep going until time runs out (say, the bomb you are trying to defuse explodes in your face) or until you botch (you cut the wrong wire, nearly setting it off and forcing you to reassess the situation).

For example, your character might attempt to repair a car's engine after it has spent a month in swampy water. The Game Master decides that you should roll your character's Intelligence + Mechanic, and that this is a complex action with a Hard Threshold. The Game Master also decides that each roll takes half an hour of game time, and that since the car needs to be used in a daring escape in about two hours, you've got to reach the total in only four rolls before time runs out. You make your first roll, and your dice add up to 10. The second roll adds up to 15, for a cumulative total of 25. The third roll gives a score of 13, bringing the grand total to 38. Your character had best hope that you get at least 17 on your fourth and final roll!

In that example, had the dice turned up all ones at any point, your character would have botched the attempt. This raises the Threshold by one step (from Hard to Formidable), representing a setback. Two botches, and the repair's a failure; perhaps your character made the problem worse. At that point he'd have to give up, and

Optional: Stepping Back Difficulty Modifiers

Anyone who has followed the progress of the Cortex System from previous incarnations knows that the game has evolved. One area in which house rules are often recognized is the use of steps and the use of Difficulty (or Threshold) modifiers. The current version of the rules uses both: Steps to reflect conditions that affect the individual's performance, and Difficulty modifiers for conditions that actually change how hard the task is to carry out.

For those that prefer one mechanic over the other, here are some quick guidelines for those who want them. Consider this your license to monkey with the rules!

Using Steps: Replace any instance of Difficulty modifiers, such as Visibility or Cover, with Skill steps. Each +2 Difficulty is roughly equivalent to a –1 Skill step.

Using Difficulty Modifiers: Replace any instance of a Skill or Attribute step, such as Traits or Aiming, with a Difficulty modifier. Each +1 Skill step is roughly equivalent to a –2 Difficulty. A Difficulty cannot be reduced to below 3 in this manner.

either start over or find someone else to do the job—unless the Game Master decides that the failure has been so catastrophic that it has prevented all further attempts.

Change of Circumstance

Sometimes things get easier or harder than usual, so the Difficulty should be adjusted accordingly. Conditions that are beyond the direct control of the character: weather, lighting conditions, storms of unholy energy, and the like. If they favor the character—say, trying to drive away a vampire while standing on holy ground—the Difficulty should drop. When the current situation is not in a character's favor—trying to accomplish the same thing in a demonic temple—the Difficulty goes up. The Game Master can simply push the Difficulty up or down levels (Average to Easy; Hard to Formidable) or he can set a specific increase or decrease. In opposed actions, external modifiers generally aren't applied. The circumstances apply equally to both sides and thus cancel each other out. In some cases, though, one side gets a benefit, such as background noise aiding a sneak thief. The Game Master adds a bonus to one side, or a penalty to the other, or both, as he sees fit. These adjustments rarely should go over +4 or –4 (or +20 to –20 for Complex actions).

Personal Edge

If the circumstances are internal, affecting a character's abilities, the actual dice rolled are subject to change. Dice are arranged in steps, and such modifiers create step bonuses or step penalties. A +1 step changes a d8 into a d10, or a d10 into a d12. A –2 step drops a d8 to a d4, and so on. A +1 step above a d12 adds a new d2, and each step beyond that increases the new die. If penalties reduce a die below d2, it is eliminated completely and the extra penalty is ignored. It's possible that circumstances completely eliminate all dice; the action automatically fails. Because of this, the exact die modified should be made clear. Steps due to equipment, weather, and other external modifiers apply to the Skill die. The effects of poisons, disease, injury, or other "internal" modifiers should be applied to the Attribute die. A circumstantial bonus or penalty to a Skill the character doesn't possess is ignored.

Assistance

Sometimes you can't do the job alone. When this happens, other characters can help out.

Direct Assistance

When two or more can combine efforts directly, the characters roll as usual and the totals are combined. For example, three characters could try heaving an ancient stone sarcophagus out of an archaeological dig site. Depending upon the circumstances, the Game Master may limit the number of characters that can combine efforts at one time.

Indirect Assistance

When one character can only offer aid to another, rolls are not added together. Instead, both characters roll, and the highest result is used. This occurs when a nurse assists a doctor, a copilot aids a pilot, and so on.

Plot Points

Plot Points are the currency of story in the game. Player characters are at the heart of the Game Master's tale, and the Plot Points allow them to stay alive longer, accomplish extraordinary things, or influence the greater story in small ways.

Plot Points should be tracked by something physical during the game. Poker chips, colored beads, or the like work well. This allows Plot Points to be exchanged by the Game Master and players regularly, quickly, and in varying amounts. That makes the game run much more smoothly; handing them out and taking them back is much less distracting. Once everyone knows how Plot

Points work, it's best that you don't discuss them at all. Instead, concentrate on translating their use into interesting and imaginative game play.

Plot Points are one of the primary rewards for players in the Cortex System. They are handed out for good role playing, good ideas, completing goals, and adding excitement—even if that means the going gets tougher!

The Game Master can decide that a particularly important character—which could be a villain or even an ally of the player characters—might have a pool of Plot Points to use. These vary based on the importance of the character, and reset with each new scene.

Gaining Plot Points

Characters start each new campaign with 6 Plot Points. During play, characters can have no more than 12 Plot Points at any one time, but can otherwise spend or save them as they see fit (if they have 12, they can't gain any more until they've spent some). If they earn or spend them in a way that makes the game more interesting, they may gain an additional Advancement Point with which to increase their abilities (see **Chapter Two: Characters** for more details on advancement and Advancement Points). Between sessions, record each character's current Plot Point total; until the current storyline or plot is completed, Plot Points carry over. The Game Master may reset each character's Plot Points to 6 at the start of a new story to reflect the transition between story arcs, or if much time has passed between one session and the next in the context of the game.

Plot Point Rewards

Plot Points should be awarded throughout play. Exactly when and how is the Game Master's call, but he shouldn't be shy about rewarding players for good role playing, clever ideas, or incredible bravery. Here are some guidelines for Plot Point distribution:

Good Role Playing (1): You came up with an awesome idea, some superior role playing, a great line, or something else so cool that everyone enjoyed it. A Plot Point award encourages more of the same. No problem if this reward comes up multiple times during a game session, or several times in a minute, even.

Complications in Play (1–3): You receive a reward for when your character's Complications make things more difficult for your character. See below for details.

Completed a Challenge (2–4): A character (or the entire group) overcomes an important challenge. The more dangerous or challenging the situation, the more Plot Points come your way. All characters involved receive the reward.

Personal Goal (3–5): The character achieves a personal goal—bringing a hated foe to justice, gaining important information, or almost anything else significant to him in a dramatic sense. The numbers suggested are for smaller stories and goals; life-long dreams, when accomplished, should merit an even larger reward. The character's personal goal might also count as a "challenge" reward situation for the rest of the group, if they were somehow involved.

Team Goal (4–6): This reward should go to each player when the team completes an important, challenging mission. When they manage to uncover the bad guy, take him down, and get home in time for dinner, everyone deserves a reward for moving the story forward.

Complications in Play

A character's Complications do just that—make life more complicated. If played well, they should be a regular source of Plot Points. Still, suffering from problems should give kick-backs only once per situation—the brave archaeologist suffering from ophidiophobia doesn't get a Plot Point for encountering a friendly pet snake on a plane, but when he's trapped in an ancient tomb filled with them it's suddenly making his life much more difficult. Complications can come up in any number of ways:

Character Initiated

Many Complications are personality quirks, and they come up when you role play your character's less-than-perfect side. When this happens, you should be rewarded. Remember, this is only going to earn a reward once per situation. Try to milk it and you'll be ignored.

Constant

Some Complications cause ongoing or unavoidable problems, such as being Blind or a missing a limb. In these cases, Plot Points are not awarded in ordinary, day-to-day situations. Rather, they are granted when the Complication becomes a significant hindrance in a given scene.

Game Master Initiated

Complications from a character's background or personal history sound off when Game Master chooses. If a story arc or adventure revolves around them, Plot Points are awarded when the root problem is revealed, not every time the Complication pops up.

Situational

Some Complications require a trigger, usually out of your direct control. Plot Points should only be awarded if the Complication places the character in direct danger or causes him a significant difficulty.

Unanticipated

Sometimes, the plotline places one character in a particularly dangerous situation with no chance of escape. Perhaps the Game Master decides that his food

was recently poisoned, or he was the one exposed to the nearly fatal disease. This might be worth a few extra Plot Points, even if no specific Complication brings on the problems. This should be rare, reserved for the extreme circumstances when the Game Master feels a specific character has been singled out for trouble, with little or no chance to avoid it—they don't get Plot Points every time something bad happens to them!

Spending Plot Points

If you've got a lot of Plot Points sitting around, things are going too well. That probably means it's about to hit the fan. Here's how those points can help when life starts going downhill.

Improving Actions

Plot Points can be spent before a roll to add an extra die. The more points spent, the bigger the die—a single Plot Point adds a d2, two Plot Points add a d4, and so on. This die becomes part of the roll, just like any other, and is added to the total. The Plot Point die does have one special trait: It cannot roll lower than the number of Plot Points expended on it (half the maximum value of the die). If it shows a lower number, it counts as equal to the points spent. When two dice are added by Plot Points, their total cost is the minimum total result, not the minimum result on each die.

You spend 3 Plot Points to add a d6 to your roll. If that d6 rolls a 1 or a 2, the actual result is ignored and it is counted as a 3. If 6 Plot Points are spent, and the d12 rolled comes up 5 or less, it counts as 6. Spending 8 points gets you a d12 and a d4. The combined total of those two dice cannot be less than 8.

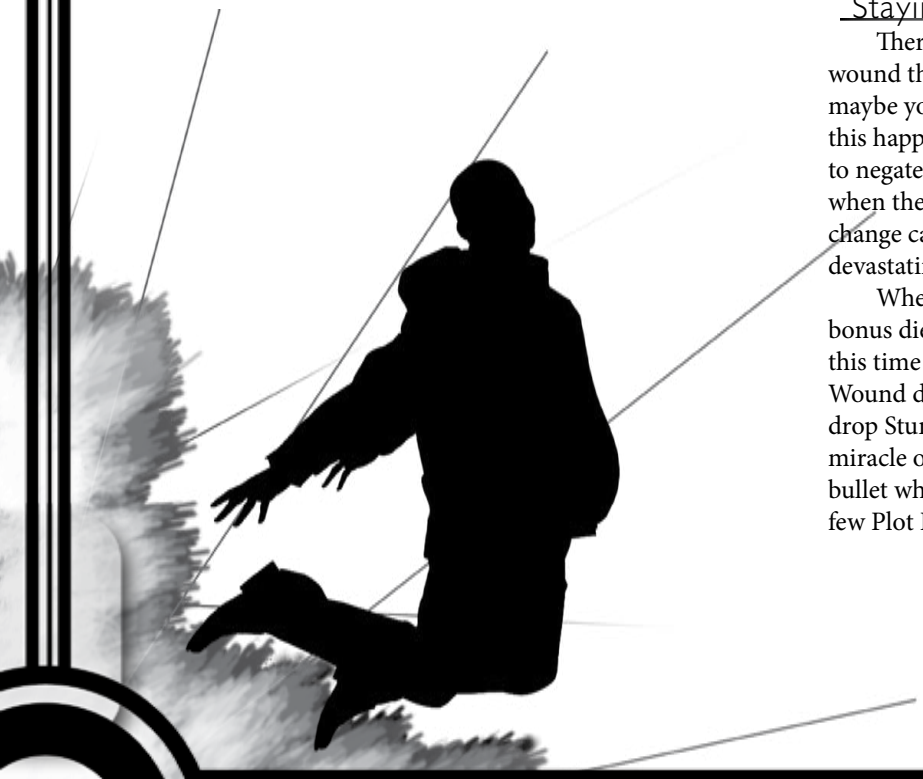


Table 5.2: Bonus Dice

Plot Points Spent	Die Type	Minimum Bonus
1	d2	1
2	d4	2
3	d6	3
4	d8	4
5	d10	5
6	d12	6
7	d12+d2	7
8	d12+d4	8
9	d12+d6	9
10	d12+d8	10
11	d12+d10	11
12	d12+d12	12

Saving Your Bacon

Sometimes, you fail when you least expect it or right when your ass is on the line. Fortunately, you may spend Plot Points after the roll to increase your final total. Hindsight has a cost, though. Each Plot Point spent this way adds exactly one point to the total. Not as valuable a windfall as if you'd spent them before rolling (since that nets you up to twice the value of your Plot Points), but it's a last resort for when you've already failed at everything else. Great for when you're jumping across a bottomless chasm and you fail your roll.

Staying Alive

There's a good chance your character will take a wound that knocks him out or kills him outright. Or maybe you just don't want to take damage at all! When this happens, you can spend Plot Points to shift the story to negate some or all of the damage. This is done only when the damage is declared, not after the fact. The plot change can't heal anyone—it just makes the blow less devastating than it otherwise might have been.

When Plot Points are spent this way, you buy a bonus die just like when you try to improve actions, but this time the result is subtracted from the damage taken. Wound damage is reduced first; any remaining points drop Stun damage. Add some description to justify the miracle of still being alive—"I dive out of the way as the bullet whizzes by my head!"—and be glad you set aside a few Plot Points.

Assets

Some Assets can be activated using Plot Points, while others allow you to spend your Plot Points more effectively. See the Asset descriptions in **Chapter Three: Traits and Skills** for details.

Story Manipulation

For the most part, the Game Master sketches out the plot and guides the action. You get in the mix through your character's actions, but that's not the only means you have to impact the storytelling. Plot Points allow you to modify that story in small ways. You can play up coincidence or try to gain a small edge for yourself, another player character, or the group as a whole.

For example, the daughter of the local lord might develop a liking for one of the player characters, or an old friend might show up at an unexpected moment to save the day or lend a hand. Whatever the case, it should always be done to make the game more interesting and fun for the players (though not necessarily their characters).

The Game Master has the power to veto plot-twisting Plot Points if they undermine the storyline. Plot Points cannot change core aspects of the tale, alter the very nature of a character, overturn prior events, or wrap the adventure up into a neat package.

When you want to spend Plot Points to change the story, make a suggestion and hand the Game Master the number of Plot Points you are willing to spend, based on how far you think you are stretching things. If the Game Master is in agreeance, he keeps the Plot Points and incorporates the suggestion—perhaps altered as he sees fit. Remember, he has a better idea of what's coming, so cut him some slack. If he likes the idea, but doesn't think you've handed over enough points, he could reduce the impact of it and use it that way, or ask for more. If the Game Master doesn't buy it, he simply rejects the Plot Point bribe and hands them back.

The Plot Points and Story Impact Table gives some pointers. Keep in mind that Plot Points are never a license to derail the story, to ruin another player's fun, or to destroy the adventure or an important premise of the campaign.

Combat

Combat is dirty, dangerous, and chaotic—it isn't pretty or for those with weak stomachs. For the most part, combat involves opposed actions: Whoever rolls higher does better. Keep that in mind, and the rest should fall into place.

Whenever things get tense, when you need to know who acts first, what happens before what, or how quickly someone can respond, the combat rules help organize things—they break the actions down into a series of moments.

The Turn

Time during tense situations is broken down into "combat turns" or just "turns." A turn lasts approximately three seconds and is meant to be just long enough for your character to do one, or maybe two, different things. Combat moves fast. You may want to spend time planning, plotting, and deciding on the best possible action, but your character doesn't have that luxury. In order to keep from getting bogged down, the Game Master should encourage players to make snappy decisions and deal with the consequences. If your character hesitates too much, he loses the chance to act that turn.

Initiative

The Game Master decides who acts first when combat starts. Usually, it's the character initiating action, hostile or otherwise. That character gets to make one action right away. After that, the players roll their character's Initiative—an Agility + Alertness Attribute

Table 5.3: Plot Points and Story Impact

Cost	Impact
1–2	**Inconsequential:** This is the bar that serves that particular kind of elven wine you always liked.
3–4	**Minor:** This is also the bar where Riga, the gossip and local rumormonger, likes to hang out.
5–6	**Moderate:** You seem to recall that this bar has rooms for rent upstairs, with windows right at the level you'd need to swing across to the guardhouse without being seen.
7–8	**Significant:** Aren't the guards usually in this bar at the same time every night, practically leaving the guardhouse wide open?
9–10	**Major:** Why, it looks as if the last person to occupy this room was a wizard. He's left his invisibility potions and everything.
11+	**Defining:** Did I say wizard? I meant incredibly powerful and helpful dragon.

Optional Initiative

If you don't like the way Initiative is calculated, change it! Here are some suggestions, subject to the Game Master's approval.

Static Initiative: Calculate Initiative as a static number. Add together the maximum values of all the dice included in your character's Initiative, and record that number on your character sheet. Instead of rolling, characters always act in this order, using dice only to break ties when absolutely necessary. Plot Points spent on Initiative rolls add a die as usual; add the roll to your Initiative for that combat.

Group Initiative: Rather than rolling Initiative for each character, one Initiative is rolled for each side. All the characters on each side act simultaneously, rolling against each other only when order is absolutely vital. Use the character with the highest Initiative on each side when rolling for his group.

roll. The Game Master may make one roll for each supporting character in the fight, or one roll for all of them. See the **Optional Initiative** sidebar for other ways to handle this.

Each turn, characters act in order of Initiative result—highest goes first, followed by next highest, and so on down the line. Should you wish, at the beginning of a subsequent turn, you may spend one Plot Point to reroll Initiative. The reroll is used for the remainder of the fight if it is higher than your character's original Initiative; it's ignored if it is lower.

If two characters have the same Initiative result, they act at the same time. If a finer distinction is needed, the tied characters roll Agility or Alertness in an opposed action until an order is established. The situation, and the Game Master's judgment, will determine which Attribute makes the most sense.

Actions in Combat

An important distinction in games run with the Cortex System is whether your character's activity during a turn is an action or not. Actions take some degree of concentration. One action is generally all your character can take in one turn without suffering penalties. Taking a shot or a swing, diving for cover, steering a bus, staunching the blood oozing from his stomach, sneaking past the guards, sweet-talking the bartender out of paying for a drink—all of these and more are actions.

Certain activities don't amount to actions. They're too short, automatic, or otherwise inconsequential to occupy your character's attention. Shouting a brief warning or order, looking around quickly, or anything else that doesn't actually interfere with your character's ability to perform other tasks. When an activity doesn't amount to an action, it can be done at any time, even during another character's turn. These nonactions can be combined, too, when it makes sense; your Game Master may cut you short on taking a lot of "free" actions if you start getting greedy. Your character can't speak more than a few seconds worth of words during a turn, for instance. Use common sense, even if your character can't.

For the most part, your character's actions take place during his turn in the Initiative order. Some actions, called reactions, can occur during another character's turn, but this usually only applies to things like dodging an enemy's attack or diving for cover from a grenade blast.

Opposed rolls require actions from both sides. Some situations vary from that general rule. For example, if your character uses an action to sneak by some guards, the guards roll their Alertness + Perception as a nonaction. Your Game Master makes the call, as usual.

Actions can't be saved from one turn to another, and you can't "hold" your turn until later in the same turn, waiting to declare your actions. Turns happen too fast for that to be possible; any hesitation means your character has to wait until the next turn to act.

In certain circumstances, it's possible to get in more than one action in a turn. In that case, multiple action penalties apply.

Multiple Actions

It's possible for your character to take a sensible number of multiple actions in one turn. Again, the watchword is *sensible*—your Game Master keeps a close eye on multiple actions in a turn. Your character has only three seconds to act. If the Game Master thinks your character is attempting too many things at once, he should determine an appropriate number of actions and tell you to hold off on the rest. As a general rule of thumb, three separate actions is pushing the limit. Some actions almost certainly chew up an entire turn (struggling with someone in a wrestling hold, attempting to break down a door). Multiple actions of this nature are not possible.

When more than one action is allowed, initial actions are more controlled, while the later ones are more ragged. The first action your character makes in a turn suffers no penalty. Every action after that accumulates penalties. The second action of a turn gets hit with a –1 Skill step. The third applies a –2 Skill step, and so on.

If a multiple action penalty would reduce the Skill die to below d0 (untrained), that action can't be attempted. If an action doesn't require a roll (running, for example), it still incurs a penalty for subsequent actions. Your Game Master then makes the call whether it can be attempted or is somehow hindered. If you are attempting to use

a Skill untrained, it is the only action you may attempt that round. Remember that activities that don't count as actions have no effect on multiple action penalties.

Movement

Most of the time, your character can move about as he pleases. Sometimes, though, it's important to know how far he or the opponents he's facing can move in a given amount of time; for example, during combat or other tense action sequences.

Walking

Your character walks at his base movement in one turn. For most characters, base movement is equal to 15 feet, but that might be altered by Traits. Walking does not count as an action.

Running

If your character is running, he can travel at twice his base movement (usually 30 feet) in one turn. This counts as an action. Your character can run for a number of minutes equal to his Vitality die's maximum result. After that, he must slow to a walk for at least 10 minutes, or rest for five, before he catches his breath.

Sprinting

Sprinting triples your character's base movement (usually to 45 feet per turn). This counts as an action, and it's the only action you can take in the turn. You can't shoot and reload when moving at this speed, for example. Dodging is also impossible, but sprinting does let your character use his innate defense, and with a +1 Attribute step. Your character can sprint for a number of turns equal to his Vitality die's maximum result. After that, he can't sprint or run, and he must slow to a walk for at least 10 minutes, or rest for five, before he catches his breath.

Jumping

An adult character can jump gaps of less than three feet from a standing start, or five feet with a moving start. No roll is needed. A roll is required, often Strength + Athletics/Jumping, in any dangerous situation, when leaping greater distances, or when an action is hindered. The Jump Difficulties Table shows how tough it is to jump a certain distance, depending on the character's movement before the jump. If no number is given, the jump can't be made. Jumping counts as an action.

Climbing

If your character is in a controlled environment and he's using safety equipment, or is tackling a particularly easy tree or ladder, no climbing roll is needed. Otherwise, use an appropriate Attribute added to Athletics/Climbing. The Difficulty depends on the climbing surface: a tree with many limbs is Easy, the side of a house is Hard. The roll is made at the start of the climb, and no additional rolls are required unless conditions change (they are attacked, harsh weather sets in, etc.), or if our character climbs for more than a minute. If things do get tense, the Game Master may require a roll each turn, or each turn something impedes the climber (say, a successful attack). Climbing counts as an action.

Characters move vertically or horizontally five feet per turn if climbing "freestyle"—on an unprepared surface. Double this rate if using a knotted rope, ladder, or similar aid to climb up, and triple it going down.

Climbing characters can't dodge or perform other actions, at the Game Master's discretion. They do apply their innate defense against attacks they are aware of, as usual.

Table 5.4: Jump Difficulties

Difficulty	Distance (Standing)	Distance (Running)
3	3′	6′
7	5′	9′
11	7′	12′
15	9′	15′
19	11′	18′
23	—	21′
27	—	24′
31	—	27′

Attacking a Target

Attacks are skilled actions. Roll the appropriate combination of Attribute and Skill, and if the total equals or beats the Difficulty, the attack succeeds. For the most part, a ranged attack uses Agility or Alertness and a Skill; close combat attacks (with or without a weapon) use Strength and a Skill. The Difficulty of successfully attacking an unmoving or unaware human-sized target is Easy. Most of the time, the target tries to avoid getting an attack. In that case, the Difficulty depends on the target's defense choice. Attacks are actions unless otherwise stated.

Your roll result determines the attack's initial damage. Subtract the defense Difficulty from the attack roll result. If it's zero, no initial damage is dealt.

If the attack has a damage die (such as when a weapon is used), roll that and apply it after initial damage is determined. Weapon damage type varies.

Ranged Attacks

If you really want to shoot someone, get as close as possible. Point blank range is 15 feet for projectile weapons and five feet for thrown weapons. Getting that

close grants a +1 Skill step. Beyond that range, accuracy depends on a weapon's range increment. For each range increment beyond the first, your attack's Difficulty increases by +2. Thus, at three range increments, the Difficulty is +6. Refer to Table 5.5 for a brief summary.

Table 5.5: Ranges

Range	Range Increments	Modifier
Short	1	–
Medium	2	+2
Long	4	+6

Defending Yourself

Targets rarely just stand there and take it. That means the Difficulty of an attack is rarely the default Easy. As a defender, your character's choices depend upon the situation and how much concentration is devoted to his defense. As with attacks, most defenses combine an Attribute and a Skill.

Innate Defense

If your character is targeted by an attack, is aware of the attacker or the attack, or is moving around at walking speed or faster, he can roll his Agility dice (unskilled, paired only with Traits or bonus dice from Plot Points) to set the attack Difficulty. Innate defense can't be botched, but if the result of the die roll is less than three, that number is used—you threw yourself in the path of the attack instead away from it, in other words.

The Game Master might choose to give you a +1 or +2 Attribute step to Agility if you are moving very quickly or in an unexpected direction, or you are moving through areas with some cover. Innate defense rolls are nonactions.

Blocking

Blocking or parrying involves intercepting an opponent's attack with a limb, object, weapon, or shield. Roll the appropriate Attribute + Skill/Specialty. The result is the attacker's Difficulty. Blocking is a reaction.

It's possible to block a weapon while unarmed but it has its own drawbacks. If an unarmed block is successful, the defender takes the weapon's listed damage after subtracting for armor (if any).

Guns and ranged attacks can't be blocked. If the shield is sturdy enough it might provide cover (see Cover, later in this chapter).

Dodging

Dodging entails any sort of ducking, leaning, sidestepping, or jumping to the side to avoid being struck by an attack. The roll here is usually Agility + Athletics/Dodge.

Dodging is usually a reaction. It counts as an action, but doesn't take place during your turn. Your Game Master may allow your character to throw himself to the ground as a nonaction, but no further movement or dodging is possible that turn. Hitting the dirt is rolled as a regular dodge. After that, the character is prone. Hitting the dirt gets you out of the way fast, but can cause problems later.

Special Factors: Offense

The following rules expand upon the basic rules for making an attack.

Aiming

Your character may aim a ranged weapon for up to three combat turns, as long as he does nothing else. Some nonactions, such as talking, may be allowed; walking or hitting the dirt is not. Aiming grants a +1 Skill step for each turn spent aiming.

Called Shots

Called shots target a specific part of the body or other small area or object. The Difficulty is increased because of the smaller target area, but the result is greater damage or effect.

Full Target: In general, assailants target the central body mass—or, an object about the size of a person, doorway, etc. Normal Difficulty.

Moderate Target: This includes targeting a leg, arm, or torso, or an object about the size of a chair. Difficulty of the attack action increases by +4.

Small Target: Attacking a hand, foot, or head, or an object about the size of a book, rifle, or helmet. Difficulty of the attack action increases by +8.

Minuscule Target: Targeting something as small as a heart, kneecap, or eye (or doorknob, pool ball, etc). Difficulty of the attack action increases by +12.

Called shots to specific body parts cause greater harm. The exact results are up to the Game Master, but some suggestions follow:

Leg/Arm: The limb is useless, which may reduce or eliminate movement or the ability to take certain actions. The damage should not kill the target outright (reduce the damage or convert it all to Stun).

Torso/Stomach/Back: Target must make an Endurance roll against the attack roll. If it fails, the character is stunned for two turns, and cannot take any actions.

Vital Area: Causes additional Wound damage. Increase the attacking weapon's die by +1 step and always inflict Wound damage. In addition the target begins bleeding. Called shots on strange, non-humanoid creatures require some kind of knowledge of what you're aiming at—and some gelatinous or otherwise bizarre creatures may not have discernible anatomy to even allow for a called shot in the first place.

Covering

Covering an area is a good way to deny it from the enemy. If anyone enters that area (comes through a doorway, comes around the corner, stands up from behind the barricade, etc), your character starts swinging or firing. Covering is an action, and the area covered must be declared when it starts.

As a rough estimate, you can't cover an area larger than a double-doorway or a corridor. If something happens in the area, your character can act immediately even when it's not his turn. If nothing happens, your character loses his chance to perform any action until his initiative comes up again. Covering can carry over from turn to turn as long as the attacker performs no other action during that time (nonactions, like talking, are possible), or doesn't move out of range. However, this does not accumulate an aiming bonus.

Chases

Chases can be exciting—pounding down a deck, along a street, or through dusty corridors, one step ahead of the enemy! Here's how they play out.

First, check to see if one person (or group) is clearly faster than the other. Unless hampered, a faster mover will almost certainly win the chase, either escaping or catching their quarry. No rolls are necessary, though navigating rough or dangerous terrain at full speed may require a roll of some kind. Failure lets the opponent win the chase.

However, if both opponents have the same base movement or the outcome is otherwise not assured, use the following rules. Chases are played out as a series of simple actions that are compared to each other. The distance between the pursuer and the pursued is abstracted onto a sliding scale:

Escaped — **Distant** — **Far** — **Close** — **Caught**

When the chase begins, follow these steps:

1. Set starting distance (usually either Close or Far).
2. Each turn each character rolls for their movement simultaneously. Everyone makes the same roll, with the Attribute + Skill and the Difficulty determined by the situation. Flat, clear terrain is Easy and uses Strength + Athletics/Running; a hillside or narrow ship's corridors is Average and uses Alertness + Athletics/Running; quickly climbing a ladder up to a catwalk is Hard and uses Agility + Athletics/Climbing.
3. If both groups succeed, fail, or gain extraordinary successes on their rolls, there's no change and both parties remain at the same distance. If one succeeds and the other fails, or one succeeds and the other achieves an extraordinary success, the distance slides on the scale one level in the favor of the winner. If one fails and the other gets an extraordinary success, the distance slides two levels in the favor of the winner.

When the distance reaches Caught, the two parties are close enough to engage in combat, grapple, and so on; the chase ends in favor of the pursuer. If the distance reaches Escaped, the pursuers are left behind or lost—the pursued should be allowed at least long enough to catch their breath before they catch up or find them again.

Each turn that one party moves faster than the other (for example, if one of the parties runs out of breath and is forced to stop Sprinting or Running), the distance automatically slides one extra level in their favor for each speed level (standing still, walking, running, sprinting) of difference.

When a covering attack is declared against a single target, it's known as threatening. If the target moves or does anything undesirable, the threatening character may attack immediately even when it's not his turn. Threatening someone for more than one turn *does* grant aiming bonuses. In addition, threatening a person adds a +2 Skill step when intimidating the target, or anyone who cares about the target in a significant way.

Crowds

When firing at a target in a crowd, or at someone engaged in close combat, any near miss is problem. Any roll that comes up with all dice showing ones or twos is considered a botch (instead of just ones). Botching causes a separate, unintentional attack roll against a nearby target determined either randomly or by the Game Master. This attack replaces the intended one.

Disarming

A close combat attack to disarm imposes a –2 Skill step; a ranged disarm suffers a –4 Skill step. If the attack succeeds, no damage is inflicted but the target must make a Hard Agility + weapon Skill roll. If failed, the target drops the weapon.

Extraordinary Success and Damage

If an attack results in an extraordinary success, the victim must make an Average Endurance (Vitality + Willpower) roll. If they succeed, nothing unusual happens. If they fail the roll, they take the damage along with the following effect, based on the type of weapon damage the attack did. Remember, unarmed damage is usually Stun.

Basic: The character suffers a debilitating injury, either a broken limb (which is useless until treated), or he has been rendered blind, deaf, immobile, or under some similar condition. The Game Master, depending on the situation, determines the exact nature of the injury.

Stun: If the damage is Stun-based, the character falls unconscious immediately, taking a number of Shock Points equal to the Stun damage inflicted during the attack, even if he doesn't have enough Stun to put him out.

Wound: If the damage is Wound-based, the character has suffered a serious injury. Without successful treatment, the character is Bleeding, and will suffer an additional d2 Basic damage every 10 minutes, and every turn that they perform strenuous activity.

Feinting

Only possible in close combat, a feint uses an opposed roll. The attacker makes an Intelligence + combat Skill/Specialty roll against the defender's Alertness + combat Skill/Specialty. If the attacker is successful, the defender can use only innate defense against the attacker's next strike.

Grappling

Getting somebody into a hold requires an Agility + Unarmed Combat/Specialty roll. Instead of any of the usual defenses available, the target can spend an action to roll Agility + Unarmed Combat/Specialty.

If the attacker succeeds, no damage is dealt. In subsequent turns, the grappled opponent is an Easy target for close combat attacks. Maintaining the grapple does not count as an action, but the grappled person is the only target that can be attacked. In order to escape a grapple, the target must beat the attacker in an opposed Athletics roll.

A grapple can also be used to push or knock over a target, rendering them prone. In that case, the attacker may maintain the hold, falling to the ground as well, or release the target to fall alone.

Improvised Weapons

Many situations exist in which your character is unarmed and gets involved in an altercation. As a desperate move, your character grabs a bottle, chair, stick, or other improvised weapon. Ask the Game Master what rules apply. Generally, the more unwieldy the item, the greater the penalty (usually a –1 to –4 Skill step). Most common items also have fairly small damage dice. On the other hand, the weapon does Basic, not just Stun damage (as fighting unarmed does).

The range increments listed in **Chapter Four: Gear** only apply when the weapon is used as intended, and is designed for such use. Brandishing a pistol has nothing to do with the gun's normal range increment. A pointy piece of metal may cause damage like a knife but it doesn't throw like one. Again, improvised weapon rules apply and your Game Master decides the Skill step penalty depending on the range and the unwieldiness of the item.

Prone

Making a close combat attack while prone incurs a –2 Attribute step penalty due to the awkward angles and inconvenience of lying on the floor. If the situation is appropriate, the Game Master may rule that this doesn't apply to long range firearm attacks.

Sneak Attack

Attacks from behind or on an unaware target have an Easy Difficulty, unless the target is moving erratically enough to warrant an innate defense roll. This is often combined with aiming or a called shot, assuming the attacker has the time.

Throwing

Tossing a weapon designed for throwing (such as a throwing knife) is handled like any other ranged attack. The attack might use Strength or Agility, depending on the weapon. Lobbing a grenade or other explosive has an Average Difficulty to hit the correct area, up to 100 feet away. When thrown, if the target is beyond 100 feet, the thrower also has to make a Strength + Athletics/Throwing (or other Skill) roll. The maximum distance of such an attack is (100 + roll's result) in feet; if that isn't enough, it falls short. If the thrower fails the Average roll to target the right area, it lands where the Game Master judges.

Two-Weapon Fighting

Fighting with two hands imposes a –1 Attribute step on the primary hand and a –2 Attribute step on the off-hand attack. The main hand attack is one action; the off-hand attack is a second action.

Unarmed Combat

It's much harder to kill someone with fists than it is to hit him with something hard, sharp, or explosive. Unarmed combat is resolved normally, but initial damage is all Stun, instead of Basic. Traits may alter the damage dealt.

When unarmed combat damage is modified, the damage is effectively "d0"—meaning that it normally does not inflict any bonus damage but it can be increased by traits or other conditions that might raise a damage die by one or more steps. For example, a +2 step bonus to an unarmed attack would make it a d4 Stun.

Visibility

Smoke, fog, and dim light make targeting an opponent much harder. Darkness or blindness is harder still.

Dim Light, Thin Smoke/Fog: +2 Difficulty to all attack actions or attempts to see more than 10 feet (except autofire).

Dark, Thick Smoke/Fog: +4 Difficulty to all attack actions or attempts to see more than 10 feet (except autofire spray attacks).

Pitch Black, Blinded: Make an Alertness + Perception/Hearing (or other sense) roll to locate a target in conditions of zero visibility. The Difficulty is Average for a target who is shouting or making a lot of noise, Hard for anyone talking or making a moderate amount of noise, Heroic for someone not moving or making much noise, and Ridiculous for someone making a stealth roll (the roll must also be higher than the target's stealth roll). Success allows the attacker to make an attack on his target. The actual attack action is still affected by poor visibility; add +4 to the Difficulty of any close combat attack action, and +6 to the Difficulty of any attack at range.

Special Factors: Defense

The following rules handle specific cases where a defensive option beyond simply dodging out of the way is available.

Cover

Putting a hard object, as large as possible, between himself and danger is your character's best defense short of not being there at all. Cover doesn't use rolls; it adds a flat number to your character's defense, depending upon how much concealment exists. Hard objects also protect against explosive damage, and operate on four levels of usefulness (or five, if you count falling on your face as being useful).

Light Cover: Up to half the body is covered. This adds +2 to the Difficulty. Remove one die of explosive damage.

Medium Cover: More than half the target is safe. Add +4 to the Difficulty. Drop two dice of explosive damage.

Heavy Cover: Almost all the defender is protected. Add +6 to the Difficulty. Three dice of explosive damage are left off.

Total Cover: Target can't be hit. If a hit is possible for some reason (defender is peeking through a hole in a bulkhead), or might do damage anyway (a heavy, but portable piece of metal could push back on the target), add +16 to the Difficulty. Explosive damage loses four dice.

Cover bonuses only apply if the Game Master decides that the blocking object is tough enough. Substances that conceal but don't block fully are treated as armor.

Cover bonuses can be avoided by using a called shot. Called shots are possible only against a body part that is not behind cover. The defense doesn't get the bonus from cover, but the Difficulty is still increased by the called shot.

Prone Targets

If your character is prone—lying face first in the mud, or on his back after being tripped—he can't dodge or even use innate defense. On the positive side, being prone is generally the equivalent of light cover, with two differences: It removes two dice from nearby explosions instead of one, unless you're on top of the explosive, in which case you take full, maximum possible damage, but reduce one die for everyone else. Also, being flat on your back is disadvantageous against close combat attacks. An attacker gains a +2 Skill step bonus. At the Game Master's discretion, blocking may not be possible.

Protective Gear

If your character can't stay behind large, hard objects, strapping on Kevlar or plate mail is the way to go. Armor doesn't stop your character from getting hit like cover does, it just make the wounds less severe. Unfortunately, the heavier the armor, the more hindrance it imposes; most truly powerful armor makes movement difficult for the wearer.

Chapter Four: Gear lists the Armor Rating of certain types of armor. The Game Master determines the Armor Rating of any ad hoc armor (e.g., an object that isn't hard enough to amount to cover). The Armor Rating is subtracted from any damage inflicted. Wound damage is reduced first, then Stun damage. Called shots to areas not covered by armor and attacks that garner Exceptional Success ignore armor.

Heavier body armor interferes with movement, range of motion, and perception. Armor of this nature lists a step penalty that is applied to Agility, Alertness, or any other rolls the Game Master deems proper. The penalties shouldn't be applied blindly however. Your Game Master should take into account the type of armor and the circumstances. A combat helmet might interfere with perception rolls, but it wouldn't affect attacks, dodging, running, or other movement. On the other hand, a full suit of body armor that includes gloves makes fine manipulation, like that required to repair something or pick a lock, much more difficult.

Special Situations

In addition to offensive and defensive combat options, a number of other techniques and situations exist during a battle or firefight. These are as follows.

Automatic Weapons

Some guns can fire more rapidly than one bullet per trigger-pull. **Chapter Five: Hunting Gear** tells you whether a weapon can fire bursts, autofire, or spray. If not, each shot is an action.

Burst: The attacker fires three bullets using one attack action against one target. The weapon's damage die advances by +1 step. Burst fire counts as one action, but you can't do it more than twice each turn. Called shots can't be bursts, and you can't benefit from aiming.

Autofire: Autofire consists of a single attack roll that uses up a third of the weapon's ammo against a single target. The weapon's damage die gains a +4 step. You can't take any other actions in the same turn as you use autofire, which includes dodging or moving. Autofire can't be used for called shots or benefit from aiming.

Spray: Spray fire uses as many bullets as autofire but directs them at an area roughly 5 to 10 feet wide, rather than a single target. The attack is a single sustained action. Everybody in the area or who moves through the area until your next turn has to defend against the attack. Cover bonuses to Difficulty are halved (rounding up) in the face of spray fire. Any successful hit gains a +2 step to the weapon's damage die. Like autofire, spray fire prevents the character from taking any other actions in the turn, and can't be used for called shots. You don't get the benefits of aiming if you choose to make a spray attack.

If you're knocked unconscious, knocked aside, disarmed, or otherwise prevented from standing there and unloading your weapon, your target area stops being dangerous to enter or move through. This attack reduces visibility penalties by 2, since you're not really targeting anything.

Spray fire may also be used as suppressive fire, penalizing everyone in the target area by forcing multiple action penalties. It's also hard to concentrate when you're standing in a hallway filled with bullets, so any action that requires focus or concentration is increased by a +2 Difficulty.

Breaking Objects

Maneuvering is great, but sometimes the direct route is more expedient. When your character needs to hack through a door, smash a box open, or otherwise break stuff, that attack is just like any other. Objects have Armor Ratings and Life Points, but are immune to Stun damage. Once sufficient Wound damage has been inflicted to overcome the object's Life Points, the thing is busted. Your Game Master sets the object's specs; the following are examples.

Handcuffs: Armor Rating 6, Life Points 2.
Rope: Armor Rating 2, Life Points 2.
Standard Door: Armor Rating 4, Life Points 6.
Reinforced Door: Armor Rating 10, Life Points 8.

Drawing a Weapon

Unless your character has an applicable Asset, drawing a weapon is an action. For those without weapons at the ready, drawing and firing imposes a multiple action penalty.

Explosions

Explosions or explosive weapons list a number of damage dice and a blast increment. Anyone within one blast increment suffers the full damage rolled. Those beyond one increment and within two increments take one less die (the one with the highest roll) in damage. Keep moving out one blast increment at a time, always removing the die with the highest result, until no more dice are left.

If circumstances create a damage step bonus or penalty in an explosive attack, the damage die type is affected, not the number of dice rolled. Also, note that any "attack roll" with a grenade or similar explosive is made to deliver the package, not cause damage—there is no initial damage, unless the grenade hits someone in the head.

The truly heroic and truly insane sacrifice themselves for their comrades. Diving on a small explosive, like a grenade, removes the highest die from the damage. That only applies to others. The hero suffers full damage.

Restraints

If your character's hands are bound, he suffers a –2 Skill step penalty to attack rolls made with pistols and close combat weapons. He can't use any form of rifle, and is extremely limited in terms of non-combat actions—the Game Master should exercise common sense here.

Escaping from restraints depends entirely the binding. Handcuffs, for example, must be broken, opened with a key, or picked. Your character might wriggle out of a binding with an Agility + Athletics/Escape Artist roll against a Difficulty set by the competence of the person doing the binding (Game Master's discretion, but usually Hard or Formidable).

Taking Damage

In any dramatic story with elements of danger, being hurt is a distinct possibility. Your character has a certain number of Life Points based upon Vitality, Willpower, and certain Traits. He can accumulate damage, either in the form of Stun or Wound. When the total damage taken (of either type) equals or exceeds your character's Life Points, he drops unconscious. If the amount of Wound is equal or greater than the Life Point total, your character is dying. In a sense, Life Points act as a yardstick by which you keep track of your character's overall state of injury and hurt.

Damage Types

Damage comes in two primary forms: Stun and Wound. A third, Basic, combines the two, while a fourth, Shock, is accumulated when unconscious characters suffer additional trauma.

Basic Damage

Initial damage, which is the first part of an attack's damage, determined by subtracting the Defense from the Attack roll, is almost always Basic. Basic damage is divided between Stun and Wound, favoring Stun with any excess. For example, if your character takes five points of Basic damage, he suffers three Stun and two Wound.

Stun Damage

Stun damage represents light injuries—bruising, scrapes, fatigue, shallow cuts, and so on. Stun damage is recovered quickly, and at worst results in nothing more than unconsciousness. Accumulated Stun damage can exceed Life Points. If your character remains conscious, the extra damage simply accumulates and is recovered normally.

Wound Damage

Wound damage is much more dangerous than Stun damage. Broken bones, punctured organs, internal bleeding, and anything else that could eventually result in death are considered Wound damage. That kind of hurt causes intense pain; wounded characters suffer penalties. When Wound damage gets high enough, the character risks death.

Shock Points

If an unconscious character receives Stun damage, it is recorded as Shock Points. If Shock Points rise above your character's maximum Life Points, he falls into a coma.

Effects of Damage

The following rules govern the consequences of taking damage. The Endurance Derived Statistic (Vitality + Willpower) is central to a character's survival.

Damage Penalties

Wound damage causes serious pain. When your character has accumulated half his Life Point total (rounded down) in Wound damage, he suffers a –2 Attribute step to all actions until he recovers or is treated thoroughly enough to stop the pain (at the Game Master's discretion—some injuries may not be treatable in this way).

Passing Out

When your character's damage, regardless of type, is greater than his Life Points, he risks falling unconscious. Roll Endurance against an Average Difficulty. Success keeps him on his feet, or at least awake. Every turn thereafter, you may repeat the roll with a cumulative +4 to Difficulty each time.

Dying

When your character suffers cumulative Wound damage equal to his Life Points, roll Endurance every minute to stay alive. The first time, the Difficulty is Easy, but it increases by +4 each minute. A dying character can be treated with a Hard Alertness + Medicine/First Aid roll. This increases the time between Endurance rolls to one hour—it requires either a Hard Alertness + Medicine/Surgery roll or a Formidable Alertness + Medicine/First Aid roll to stabilize them completely.

If accumulated Wound damage exceeds twice your character's Life Points, he dies immediately—most likely in extremely brutal fashion.

Other Injuries

Getting shot, stabbed, broken, or beaten is bad enough, but that's not the only way to get hurt. Many of these additional forms of injury require the use of a Resistance (Vitality + Vitality) action to avoid or lessen their impact.

Drugs and Poison

Alcohol, drugs, and poisons can cause a variety of effects, but they are all fought off with a Resistance roll. The exact Difficulty and effects are up the Game Master. As a guideline, the downside of heavy drinking starts as a Hard Difficulty and gets worse as the character drinks more. A rare poison that causes unconsciousness, and later death, if left untreated might be Formidable to resist.

Environmental

Damage caused by (non-instantly fatal) extremes of temperature. Every hour of exposure without adequate protection causes d2 Stun damage. Game Masters may also impose risks of frostbite, heatstroke, and similar if they wish.

Falling

Dropping more than a few feet can cause damage. The falling character must roll Agility + Athletics/ Gymnastics to avoid damage (note that anyone lacking the specialty may always fall back on the Athletics general skill). The Difficulty is Easy if the fall is 10 feet or less. The Difficulty increases by +4 for each 10 feet beyond that. If the damage is not avoided, the fall is treated as an attack with a roll result equal to its Difficulty. Damage is Basic type.

Agility penalties from armor almost always apply to falling, but an Armor Rating rarely protects a falling character.

Fire

Burns are Wound damage caused by heat or fire. They heal at half the normal rate and often leave disfiguring scars.

Illness

Your character fights off disease with Resistance rolls. The Difficulty and effects depend upon the disease. Illness effect could range from a –1 Attribute step to all actions for a minor cold, to almost certain death.

Radiation

Exposure to harmful radiation causes damage—first Stun, and then Wound. Like burn damage, radiation injury is difficult to treat. Stun does not begin to recover until the character receives proper medical treatment; Wound damage takes twice as long to heal.

When exposure begins, the Game Master determines a time increment—one day for light radiation, one hour for moderate, one minute for heavy radiation, or even one turn in extreme cases. Exposed characters suffer d2 Stun damage each increment. When accumulated Stun reaches your character's Life Points, he begins to suffer d2 Wound damage each increment. Radiation injury can be prevented with proper precautions, such as inoculations or radiation-proof HAZMAT suits (or in some game settings, magical protection). These measures increase the time increment, or the character is rendered immune to the radiation.

Suffocating

Humans and other living creatures need to breathe. When prepared, your character can hold his breath for 30 seconds with an Easy Resistance roll. Every 30 seconds beyond that the Difficulty increases by +4. Once the character fails a roll, he begins to suffer d2 Stun damage every turn. Once your character has passed out, suffocation causes d2 Shock *and* d2 Wound damage every turn.

If unable to prepare by drawing a quick breath, a suffocating character's Resistance roll Difficulty starts at Hard.

Conditions

In addition to standard physical damage from weapons and other trauma, your character may find that he suffers from a number of related conditions that make his life even worse.

Bleeding

Bleeding characters take d2 Basic damage every turn that they perform strenuous activity. If they lay still and breath easy, they suffer the same damage every minute. If they are able to slow the bleeding through a tourniquet or applied pressure, the damage is reduced to once every 10 minutes.

Fatigued

When your character stays awake longer than 24 hours he suffer penalties from fatigue. Every eight hours he remains awake past 24 he acquires two points of Stun damage. As fatigue poisons drain his strength, he also suffers a –1 Attribute step for every 24 extra hours he remains awake. If any Attribute is reduced to less than d2 this way, your character passes out.

Combat causes exhaustion, adrenaline rushes, and often involves strenuous activity. Your Game Master may rule that every half hour of battle-readiness, combat, or similar activity counts as being awake for eight hours for fatigue purposes.

Fatigue penalties can be staved off with rest. Sleeping for 10 to 30 minutes ignores a number of hours spent awake equal to the result of a Willpower roll. Resting an hour or two ignores a number of hours spent awake equal to the result of a Willpower + Discipline/Specialty roll. Your character gains rest benefits once every 12 hours.

A full night's rest (eight to 12 hours) ignores all hours spent awake for this purpose, and removes all fatigue damage and penalties. Stimulant drugs (or potions, charms, or spells in a magical setting) can temporarily alleviate fatigue damage and penalties, but once they wear off all symptoms will reappear, including any accumulated but suppressed during the time spent under the stimulant's influence.

Intoxicated

Drugged characters are affected in various ways based on the drug in their system. Being drunk imposes 4 Stun that clears up only after sobering up. Drunk characters also suffer a –2 Attribute step penalty to all actions.

Stunned

Stunned characters can't perform actions. They defend themselves with innate defense, if at all.

Recovery

Once the firing stops, it's time to gather the wounded and bury the dead. Healing takes time, and sometimes Skills and resources. Serious injuries, if left untreated, can prove fatal. If you're lucky, only the team members you can't stand will have been killed—or those who have a way of coming back from the grave.

Recovering Stun Damage

Stun damage is the easiest to recover. As long as your character has no Shock Points and no special condition applies, Stun damage goes away at the rate of one point per hour of rest, or two hours of light activity. Combat, high stress levels, or heavy work doesn't count as light activity, but reading, talking, and eating do.

If your character is unconscious, he wakes when enough Stun damage is eliminated that total damage drops below his Life Points.

If unconscious, any Shock Points must be removed first, before Stun damage heals. Shock Points ensure unconsciousness for at least one hour. After that, your character makes an Average Endurance (Vitality + Willpower) roll once an hour to eliminate a Shock Point. Once all Shock Points have been removed, your character may eliminate Stun normally.

Second Wind

Aside from Plot Points, your character has an extra edge in recovering from fatigue and exhaustion. Once a day, he can use **second wind** to recover from Stun instantly. Choose either Vitality or Willpower, roll the chosen Attribute, and immediately reduce current Stun damage by the result.

Recovering Wound Damage

Wound damage is much harder to get rid of. Nothing is going to get better without sufficient rest and nourishment. Light activity is possible but it must be limited in duration.

After two days of rest, your character makes an Endurance (Vitality + Willpower) roll. The Difficulty depends on the amount of Wound damage inflicted. The Wound Recovery Table has the details. Major injuries (over 6 Wound) are extremely difficult to recover from without medical aid. If the Endurance roll is failed, your character must wait until the next day to try again.

Once the appropriate Endurance roll succeeds, your character begins recovering. From that point on, he eliminates one point of Wound damage for every two days of rest.

Table 5.6: Wound Recovery

Wounds	Recovery Difficulty	Surgical Threshold
1–2	No Check Required	-
3–4	3	15
5–6	7	35
7–8	11	55
9–10	15	75
11–12	19	95
13–14	23	115
15–16	27	135
17–18	31	155
19–20	35	175
21–22	39	195
23–24	43	215

Getting Worse

If you botch the Endurance roll to begin recovery, your character gets worse. Every day, he suffers d2 Wound damage, and must make another Endurance roll based on current Wound damage, to halt the deterioration. Once the damage is stopped, another Endurance roll is needed to begin recovery.

Medical Assistance

A medic might keep you alive on the battlefield. Once things settle down, you should probably get to a doctor. In historical or fantasy settings, surgery might not be an option but other methods of healing might be available.

First Aid

When your character is bleeding or has taken more Wound damage than his Life Points, First Aid keeps him alive until medical assistance arrives. The medic (or healer, physician, wise woman, etc.) spends several turns working and makes a Hard Alertness + Medicine /First Aid roll. If successful, the time between the patient's Endurance rolls to stay alive increases from one minute to one hour. An Average success stops most bleeding, but that rises to Hard when treating bleeding caused by an extraordinary success on an attack. It takes a Formidable First Aid roll to stabilize a dying character completely, preventing further rolls. This can only be attempted once per First Aid situation, though the initial treatment to extend the time between rolls can be attempted multiple times. First Aid rolls assume that the treating character is in the field with a standard First Aid kit or equivalent. If no kit is available, First Aid attempts take a –2 Skill step. If a field hospital or ambulance is available, the attempts gain a +1 Skill step. Actual medical facilities grant a +2 Skill step.

Table 5.7: First Aid

First Aid Conditions	Skill Step Modifier
Improvised supplies, heavy distractions	–2
Limited supplies, light distractions	–1
Standard supplies, no distractions	0
Superior supplies, ambulance conditions	+1
Cutting-edge supplies, hospital conditions	+2

Waking the Unconscious

Characters who are out, but have no Shock Points, can sometimes be roused with a slap, a shout, cold water, or the like. They make an Average Endurance (Vitality + Willpower) roll to wake up. This can be done once per turn. If the character succeeds, his Stun damage is reduced to the point that total damage is one less than his maximum Life Points.

Reviving the Dead

Sometimes, quick action can resuscitate the newly dead. The medic performs First Aid, but the Difficulty starts at Formidable and increases by +2 for every minute the character has been clinically dead. If successful, the patient makes an Endurance roll at the same Difficulty that caused his death (see Dying, above). If that works, the character is alive but still dying. He can be treated or stabilized but must still make Endurance rolls to stay alive.

Characters who die from massive damage (double Life Point maximum in Wound) can't be revived; they would require special supernatural or technological means to bring them back to life.

Stimulants

If your character is loaded on stimulants, he will be both awake and alert. For six hours, he experiences a state of heightened awareness—all fatigue penalties are eliminated and a +1 Attribute step is granted to Alertness and Agility. After six hours, he crashes, and returns to whatever fatigued state he started in. He also suffers an additional –2 Attribute step until he gets at least 12 hours of rest or takes another round of stimulants. Each six-hour up cycle imposes cumulative Attribute step penalties. Using stimulants continuously for more than 12 hours can be extremely dangerous.

Stimulants also temporarily heal Stun damage, but when they wear off (in about six hours), that damage returns. Stimulants heal d2 to d12 Stun, depending on the dosage. Note that when the stimulant wears off, the "healed" Stun damage is suffered all over again, all at once—possibly knocking the character unconscious instantly.

Sedatives

Barbiturates or other sedating drugs temporarily apply an across-the-board Attribute step penalty, ranging from –1 to –4, depending on the strength of the sedative. This is accompanied quite often by a feeling of relaxation and lowered anxiety, which makes sense given that you're being chemically knocked out. If the step penalty would reduce your character to d0 in any Attribute, he's unconscious. The sedative may last from as little as an hour to as many as 12, again depending on the dose and the sedative type.

Painkillers

Painkillers temporarily relieve any damage penalties imposed by Wound. By design, anyone can apply these drugs; no roll is needed. With other medicines, the user must make an Intelligence + Medicine/Pharmaceuticals roll (Easy for common drugs, Hard for complicated or

rare compounds) to determine how much of what will be useful, rather than fatal or impotent. Most painkillers last six hours, but some might last as long as 12.

Surgery

It's possible that your character will become so badly injured that he can't begin recovery on his own—he needs a bullet taken out, a heart bypass, that sort of thing. In that case, surgery is needed. Surgery is a complex action, usually with time increments of 10 or 30 minutes, using Agility + Medicine/Surgery. The Threshold is based on the amount of Wound the patient has taken—see Table 5.7, above. For badly injured and dying patients, the surgery prevents your character from having to make Endurance checks during the operation.

If the surgery is successful, the patient begins to heal. Particularly bad injuries might require advanced treatment, therapy, or even more surgery to put your character back in fighting shape. Just because your character is healing from the mangling of a limb, that doesn't mean he gains use of that limb back yet.

Botching surgery is a terrible thing. If a surgeon botches twice, the complex action fails and the patient suffers an extra d2 Wound damage. The entire process must be started again.

Scale

Sorry, but the truth is that size does count—at least in the Cortex System game. Cars, dinosaurs, giant space amoebas, submarines, and skyscrapers are diffcult to damage or destroy with your handy sidearm or trusty longsword.

Our game deals with this in terms of scale. The three scales are **Personal**, **Large**, and **Massive**.

Personal scale is just that—the size of roughly human-sized characters (including the really small or large specimens). Humans, velociraptors, and androids are all examples of Personal scale. Damage at Personal scale is only 10% effective against Large targets—it takes 10 points of Personal damage to inflict just 1 point to a Large opponent. Damage at Personal scale to a Massive target is nearly impossible, only 1% effective—taking 100 points of Personal damage to inflict just 1 point to a Large opponent. Round down when determining damage at shifting scales.

Large scale (sometimes called Vehicle Scale in other Cortex System games) includes things the size of cars to small buildings. A tyrannosaurus rex, pickup truck, fighter jet, and 20-foot-tall guardian robot are all examples of the Large scale. Damage at Large scale is quite effective against Personal scale targets, inflicting 10 times the normal damage. So 3 points of Large damage are actually 30 points to a player character (and probably ruining his entire weekend). Damage at Large scale is only 10% effective against Massive targets—meaning it takes 10 points of Large damage to inflict just 1 point to a Massive opponent. Twelve points of Large damage would only inflict a single point against a massive victim (10% rounded down).

Massive creatures and objects generally make their Personal counterparts seem like tiny little bugs scurrying around beneath them. City-destroying lizards, spaceships, aircraft carriers, and 80-story buildings are all example of the Massive scale. Damage at Massive scale is ridiculously effective and almost always fatal to those at the Personal scale, inflicting 100 times the standard damage. Seven points of Massive damage would cause 700 points of damage to a human-sized target and probably leave nothing more than a greasy smear or charred circle where he once stood. Massive damage is quite effective against Large targets, causing 10 times more than normal. An attack that caused 2 points of Massive damage would inflict 20 points on the Large victim.

Vehicles

Vehicles in a Cortex System game serve much the same purpose they do in real life: They get people from place to place. Most of the time, this isn't a big deal. The plot doesn't center on the trips between locations—it centers on what happens after the characters arrive on scene.

When this is the case, the vehicle is solely a tool—a piece of equipment that does its job and doesn't require rolls to use. However, sometimes, you might need to know a bit more about your ride.

Hazardous Conditions

Usually, driving, sailing, or even flying won't require a roll—why? Remember the two basic guidelines: You don't roll unless there's a chance of failure, and you don't roll if failure would completely ruin the game in a way that has nothing to do with the story. Your characters should never die in a completely random accident before the adventure even starts!

However, if a villain's henchman is trying to run your character off the road, then it's no random accident. And if there's a good chance he can survive, then the failure of the pilot or driver doesn't result in unavoidable death.

When the reasons are appropriate, bad conditions might force you to make a roll for the driver or pilot of a vehicle. When this happens, only one of the players rolls. In a vehicle with a multi-person crew the primary roll is made on behalf of the character most directly in charge of steering. Others might be able to offer indirect assistance if the Game Master rules it appropriate.

The roll to control a vehicle will usually be a combination of Strength (to control a bucking, pulling wheel), Agility (to accurately make rapid adjustments to

direction or speed), or Alertness (to avoid road hazards, know where to point the vehicle, and so on) combined with the appropriate Skill (Watercraft/Specialty, Pilot/Specialty, or Drive/Specialty). The Game Master sets the Difficulty based on the conditions.

Controlling a vehicle at normal speed in good terrain, during calm weather in daylight should be Easy if a roll is forced. Bad weather, bad terrain, distractions, high speeds, and so on all have the chance to increase the Difficulty. Each negative factor impacts the roll by increasing the Difficulty by up to +4. For example, driving a car at normal speeds during a light rainstorm (+2) on a dark night (+4) while people chatter quietly in the back (+1) goes from being an Easy task to a Difficulty of (3 + 2 + 4 + 1) 10.

The quality of the vehicle adds a modifier to your character's Skill dice. This is called the vehicle's Maneuverability, and ranges from a penalty of –3 Skill steps to a bonus of +3 Skill steps. Most vehicles have a Maneuverability of 0, which has no effect on your roll, but damaged, old, or high-tech vehicles change that.

Damage & Injury

Vehicles are susceptible to damage just like your character. They follow the standard rules for Breaking Objects (see the Special Situations section on page 96); they are immune to Stun damage, have an Armor Rating that protects them, and have a certain number of Life Points that determine how much damage they can suffer before failing.

Vehicles that have taken half or more of their Life Points in damage become harder to control; they take a –2 step to their Maneuverability (which can bring it down to as low as a –5 Skill step). Vehicles that accumulate damage equal to or greater than their Life Points cease functioning. Most boats will sink and airplanes crash at this point, but depending on how the damage was inflicted, this might not be an immediate, sudden affair. Vehicles that take twice their Life Points in damage, however, are completely destroyed or totaled.

Barring complete destruction, most vehicles can be repaired. This takes time, money, and a competent mechanic—not something to be role played out. If it's important to the plot that the characters repair a vehicle quickly, the Game Master may allow a mechanic to perform the repairs. As long as they have the parts and equipment, repair works in the same way as surgery (see Surgery, page 101), save that each roll takes an hour and the final result actually "heals" the damage to the vehicle.

Crashes & Collisions

Generally speaking, serious problems occur when a vehicle hits something. Calculate the damage based on the speed of the vehicle: up to 10 miles an hour inflicts d4 Basic damage. Beyond that, every 10 mph increase adds +1 step to this damage die, and it becomes Wound instead of Basic damage. If the vehicle would take damage from the collision (for example, it hit a tree), it takes the same damage after Armor reductions. If two vehicles collide, calculate and roll damage for each separately, and apply both results to both vehicles.

If your character is trying to use his vehicle as a weapon, the attack roll is Alertness + Skill/Specialty, with the Skill modified by the vehicle's Maneuverability. Unlike normal attacks, there is no initial damage—beating the target's defense simply counts as a successful hit (which could be dodging, an Initiative roll against the attack roll, or anything else the Game Master rules appropriate; some creatures may be able to block the attempt!). Damage is determined as normal for a collision. Personal scale armor usually won't help.

Vehicle Weapons

Most vehicle-mounted weapons are highly controlled, since governments, bad guys, and average people alike all see them as highly obvious signs of danger. However, should characters commandeer a vehicle with mounted weaponry, the Game Master should determine the weapon's statistics. For example, a mounted machine gun is likely to have stats similar to a large automatic weapon, with an increased damage die and a much larger ammunition capacity.

These kinds of weapons aren't generally conducive to letting nearby innocents survive, or any form of stealth, or precision work, or indoor jobs—so, again, Game Masters are advised not to place them into the hands of the player characters too often. But don't let that advice get in the way of a good story!

Chase Scenes

Chases in vehicles work just like any other chase—see the **Chases** sidebar on page 93. The important thing to remember here is that driving faster than is safe in a particular vehicle increases the Difficulty of the rolls the driver has to make—and that may be necessary, if one party in the chase has a superior vehicle!

CHAPTER 6
WINDOW DRESSING

The reckless warrior slashes the goblin with his sword. The grizzled detective shoots a violent suspect with his .44 Magnum. The alien science officer takes careful aim and blasts a dangerous creature with his energy weapon.

All of these scenes take place in different genres with very different characters and are descriptively quite distinct from each other. But here's the dirty little secret: Their weapons all do d6 Wound damage. If you boil it down to simple game terms, it's exactly the same. The rest is all window dressing.

The Cortex System is quite simple by design. Attribute die plus Skill die plus Trait die (if applicable), and in combat you get a bonus die of damage if you're using a weapon. Doesn't matter if you're a club-wielding caveman, spell-tossing wizard, or psychic alien. The rules are simple to give you room to tell a story.

In this chapter we're going to open the door to customizing the rules to fit the genre, setting, and story you want to tell. The rule of thumb is that you want the rules to stay out of the way. Anything you add or change should be intuitive, based on the dirt-simple basics we introduced back in Chapter One. Please note that nothing in this chapter is intended to be either complete or comprehensive. These are examples, ideas that a Game Master can build upon for his particular campaign. With that in mind, create superheroes, alien science, altered reality, fathomless horror, or anything else you can think of. Go have fun, and have at it. This is your game now.

Channeling Magic

Channeling magic assumes a world in which ambient magical forces of some kind exist from which skilled or gifted individuals are capable of drawing power. The spellwielding character knows how to draw on the magical energy, "channel" it through his body, and use it to create effects both great and terrible. These rules are an example of how to represent "classic" fantasy spellcasters, and can be modified for use in many settings.

Magic Traits

Practitioners of channeling magic, or channeling mages, possess a Trait that gives them access to a list of magic effects. Depending on the campaign setting, this may be a single Asset (like Spellcaster or Will-Worker) or one of a series of Assets based on specific organizations, disciplines, or schools of magic (like Divination Adept or Order of the Cowl Initiate). This Trait pulls double-duty, acting effectively as a Skill for the casting of spells (or miracles, or bardic songs, or whatever you wish to call the magical effects), and usually provides some other small benefit, such as adding a bonus to Skilled actions. Without a magic Trait, a character cannot create magical effects in a channeling magic campaign.

If you prefer to use Skills instead of Traits, and thus enable faster advancement in magical talent, consider offering a d2 or d4 Trait that indicates a mage's talent for channeling magic, and which allows player characters to purchase a rating in a Spellcasting or Channeling Skill. Specialty Skills would include Offensive, Defensive, Psychic, Illusion, or some other subset of spells.

Casting Actions

A **casting action** is an attempt to use a magic Trait to create an effect, whether it's a necromancer intoning a Spell of Frightful Wail or a bard playing a Song of Courage. Casting actions are complex actions. Each spell, invocation, or song description includes a Threshold and the Attribute + Trait combination required to cast it. When it's the channeling mage's turn, he may begin the casting action and roll the dice. Each turn he continues to roll until the cumulative total reaches the Threshold—at which point the spell takes effect.

For a faster, dirtier system, Difficulties are used in place of Thresholds, and casting becomes a simple action. The benefit of this is that extraordinary successes may be earned, opening up the possibility of secondary magical effects, critical successes, and so forth. The downside is that magic becomes a do it or you don't affair; complex actions will eventually be successful, assuming the channeling mage isn't hurt or distracted. The decision to go with complex versus simple actions is up to you and how you see channeling magic working in your game. When making these decisions, try to think about how magic will balance so that spellcasters aren't too much stronger or weaker than the non-magic characters.

Most spells designed to attack a target also require a separate attack action. In effect, the casting action prepares the spell for release, and the attack action is the channeling mage directing it at the target. Because this allows for an extraordinary success, most attack spells should specify what the spell does in those circumstances.

Some spells can be maintained after they have been cast. Essentially, your mage makes a simple action each turn (the Difficulty is determined by the spell) and the effects will persist until your next turn comes up. If you are maintaining a spell in this way, however, you can be

distracted (see Disrupting Casting Actions), it counts as an action for the purposes of multiple action penalties, and you can't cast any other spell at the same time.

Strain

Channeling magic is taxing on the physical body of the mage. This is known as **strain**. Each turn in which a channeling mage engages in a casting action, he acquires a point of Stun. It is possible for a relatively unlucky, worn out, or inexperienced mage to lose consciousness before completing the spell! Resting may eliminate Stun that is acquired in this manner.

If a channeling mage's roll comes up all ones on a casting action—a botch—he takes d6 Stun immediately and may not attempt to cast that spell until he recovers from the Stun damage.

A mage may voluntarily suffer Stun damage in order to increase his chances of completing a casting action sooner. Each point of Stun he takes acts like a Plot Point being used to add a die to the casting action. Thus, 1 point of Stun adds a d2, 2 points of Stun adds a d4, and so on. A mage may combine this self-imposed strain with Plot Points to add larger die types, as well; spend 4 Plot Points and take 2 points of Stun, and a mage may add a d12 to the casting action. As with Plot Points, the minimum points added to a casting action through the use of strain equal the amount of Stun damage willingly taken. A channeling mage may choose to do this before rolling the dice on his turn, or after he already makes a roll, though if the latter option is taken, only one point is added to the result for every point of Stun (just as with Plot Points.)

Resisting Magic

Targets can attempt to avoid most directed spells. Typically, avoiding a spell requires either a Resistance roll (Vitality + Willpower) or an active dodge (Agility + Athletics/Dodge), depending on the nature of the spell. As a rule of thumb, if the spell is a ranged attack of some kind, a target avoids it by throwing himself out of the way. Otherwise, he can simply tough it out with a Resistance check. The Difficulty of most of these spells to avoid or resist the effects is usually one level higher than the Threshold for the casting action—Average for an Easy Threshold, etc. Each spell describes the outcome of successfully avoiding or resisting the effect. Spells that don't target others don't need to be avoided, of course.

Disrupting Casting Actions

It takes a fair amount of concentration to channel the forces of the universe, and being struck in the gut by a troll's hammer just might make you forget exactly how a spell goes. Generally, when exposed to distracting environmental effects—blowing sand, a galloping horse, noxious swamp gas—the mage must make an Easy (3) Willpower + Discipline/Concentration action each turn to avoid losing the spell. Being attacked, or thrown into a river, or subjected to some other major event requires an Average (7) action. The Game Master may even call for a Hard (11) action if the situation is even worse.

Failure means the accumulated total of the complex action is lost; the mage must start over. If the mage rolls a botch on this Discipline action, then this is treated as rolling a botch on the casting action (and all that implies). If the action is a success, however, the mage may continue with the casting action.

Sample Spells

Here's a selection of spells in the format used by channeling mages. These could easily be used to represent wizard spells, holy invocations of priests, or the willworking of a witch or shaman. In each spell description, N is a variable that equals the die type of the channeling Trait possessed by the mage. For instance, if the channeling mage has Wizard of the Dark Tower d4, N is equal to 4.

You may notice that a Trivial (5) Threshold is listed in one instance. This represents a complex action that is even easier than Easy and which can usually be completed in one turn.

Channeling magic assumes each character has access to a handful of spells, acquired in some manner depending on the campaign. It's possible there's a finite number available (perhaps contained within the *Compleat Tome of Spelles*), or there could be one spell for every channeling mage in history (like the famous *Colbert's Conservative Credo*, or the lost *Transformational Sphere of Grog*), or something in between.

Spell of Bedazzlement

Willpower + Channeling Trait, Easy (15)

This spell creates a dazzling spray of lights and colors targeting up to N opponents standing in a group, not more than 5 feet from each other, up to (N x 10) feet away. All affected targets take d6 Stun and suffer a –2 Attribute step on all Alertness actions until the end of their next turn. Resisting the effects is an Average task but reduces the damage to d4 Stun and no additional penalties are incurred.

Spell of Blinding

Alertness + Channeling Trait; Easy (15)

You target one creature and render them blind for up to N turns. The target may resist with an Average Resistance action. Blinded creatures act as if they were in total darkness; see the rules for Visibility in **Chapter Five: Rules**.

Spell of Choking Mist

Vitality + Channeling Trait; Easy (15)

You flood an (N x 10) foot diameter area up to (N x 20) feet away with thick, poisonous gas. Anyone in the target area, friend or foe alike, takes d6 S and must spend their next action gagging and choking and moving at half speed. You may maintain the spell each turn with an Easy simple action, but it counts toward multiple action penalties. Fighting off the Stun damage is an Average Resistance action, but the choking effects apply until an affected creature leaves the area of the mist.

Spell of Farseeing

Alertness + Channeling Trait, Easy (15)

You may extend your sight N miles from your current location, allowing you to see objects and people as if they were right next to you, for up to N minutes. To add hearing to this spell increases the Threshold to Average.

Spell of Fear

Willpower + Channeling Trait, Average (35)

Up to N targets are stricken with terror and must move away at full speed from you or suffer a –2 Attribute step to all their actions. It is Hard to resist this, and targets are allowed to check on each turn including the first.

Spell of Flaming Doom

Agility + Channeling Trait; Average (35)

Creates a raging torrent of fire up to (N x 10) feet away. Targets take 3d6 W at the center of the blast. For every 10 feet out from the center, one die of damage is removed (remove the highest rolled die, then the next highest). Avoiding this is a Hard Agility + Athletics/Dodge action, but if successful, damage is converted to Stun. This effect may be maintained each turn with an Easy casting action, but doing so counts toward multiple action penalties.

Spell of Inspiration

Alertness + Channeling Trait, Easy (15)

Up to N allies within (N x 10) feet of you are motivated to perform better until your next turn. On an affected ally's turn, the ally gains a +1 Skill step on all actions.

Spell of Invisibility

Willpower + Channeling Trait, Average (35)

This renders you completely invisible to other living creatures for as long as you concentrate. If you attack or otherwise interact with a living creature, that creature may attempt a Hard Alertness + Perception action to break through the illusion. Attempting another action while invisible incurs multiple action penalties, and if you take any Wound damage, the spell is broken. While invisible, anyone trying to attack you (assuming they know you are there) must act as if affected by total darkness; refer to the rules for Visibility in **Chapter Five: Rules**. Those who break through the illusion must still add +N to the Difficulty to attack you for N turns because of the shadowy veil that persists.

Spell of Mindtouch

Intelligence + Channeling Trait, Trivial (5)

This spell allows you to speak telepathically with a single target, using languages you know. It doesn't allow you to read minds or scan thoughts. Maintaining this spell requires focus; performing other actions (such as combat) incurs multiple action penalties. Resisting this mental contact is Easy and once it's done the target cannot be affected for 24 hours.

Spell of Object Location

Alertness + Channeling Trait, Hard (55)

This spell lets you find an object that you are personally familiar with (i.e. have studied for more than a couple of minutes) so long as it is within (N x 10) miles. You know the direction in which to head, and how far away you are from the object. So long as you remain focused on the object, you can continue to locate it; performing other actions (such as combat) incurs multiple action penalties. To find an object you are not familiar with but only had described to you is Formidable (75).

Spell of Shielding

Vitality + Channeling Trait, Easy (15)

Creates a whirling aura of semi-transparent disks which grant you an Armor Rating of N Wound until your next turn. You may sustain this each turn without further spellcasting actions, but multiple action penalties apply if you do anything else. This spell converts N Wound damage from ranged attacks to Stun after the Armor Rating is applied.

Magical Gear

The elements of the channeling magic system suggest a variety of magical trinkets, tools, and trinkets to help the aspiring channeling mage along in his career. You can use some or all of the following, or develop variations of your own. Although no prices are listed, you should refer to **Chapter Four: Gear** for ideas on how to get these into your players' hands. Arcanite is the most common resource for a channeling mage, but should still cost a hefty sum. Leystones are rare indeed, both because they are prized by mages and because it takes decades for a single leystone to be created.

Note: You may prefer to have magic items of any kind to require some ritual of attunement before they can be used by a channeling mage. A Hard Intelligence + Channeling Trait action might bond a mage to his newly found item; alternately, each item might require an extensive ritual (and thus a complex action). This sort of mechanic is key to keeping items out of the hands of the unworthy, but if your campaign has no such limits you won't need to concern yourself with it.

Arcanite Crystal

Arcanite (or arcanium, if you want a metallic compound instead of a crystalline one) is a blue-white mineral that absorbs the backlash of channeling magic. When a channeling mage holds a properly cut arcanium crystal, the crystal absorbs any Stun damage that results from casting spells or using strain. Each crystal can hold a certain amount of Stun before it turns black, at which point it is useless (but see Leystones, below). The amount of Stun can vary on the skill of the gemcutter (or smith, if you're using arcanium) but the typical range is 4–12. Arcanite is often set into jewelry or precious metals in place of gemstones, which hides its true purpose.

Leystones

When arcanite is filled with Stun damage, it no longer serves its original purpose. Reduced to a black lump of rock, it is usually discarded. Some channeling mages discovered that arcanite left for a long period of time (years, perhaps centuries) at the intersection of two or more leylines—invisible paths of magical force that stretch across the landscape—acquires a new property. The dull black coloration becomes a lustrous purplish-red, and the mineral acts as a battery of magical power that can supplement the channeling mage's own channels. A leystone is rated much like a arcanite crystal, from 4–12. In game terms, each point acts like a point of strain but without the Stun damage. Thus, by spending 6 of a leystone's points, a channeling mage can add a d12 to his casting action.

The practical limit of how many points may be spent in one turn is the channeling mage's own Magic Trait; you cannot spend more than your die value in points. Of course, you can spend more of the leystone's contained magic in successive turns in order to complete the casting action faster.

Leystones that have surrendered all of their magic then crumble into powder. So far, no further use has been discovered for this dust, but research continues ….

If you use arcanium instead of arcanite in your campaign, leystones are instead leymetal, and used in much the same way. Once expended, leymetal corrodes into a dusty remnant.

Resonant Wand

A resonant wand is a length of treated wood, metal, or bone, usually carved or inscribed with mystic runes and sigils. The wand's purpose is to direct and focus channeling magic, enabling a channeling mage to improve the link between himself and his target. Each resonant wand has a die type associated with it, from d2 to d8 (or more, in rare cases.) When a resonant wand is held in one hand while a spell that targets another creature or object is cast, the mage may add a roll of the wand's die to the Difficulty of any Resistance or dodge action taken by the target. Some resonant wands are attuned to living or non-living targets only; the former are usually bone, the latter metal. Others only work with specific kinds of magic, such as necromancy, elemental fire, or charm magic.

Meta-Talents

In some campaign settings, magic is a very personal and intrinsic part of a hero. It may not even be thought of as magic, but rather as superhuman ability, or perhaps the result of years of mystical training and practice. This system is referred to as Meta-Talents, though it will inevitably acquire some other name depending on how you implement it.

Wuxia martial artists in Mythic China, the Extraordinary Gentlemen of the late Victorian era, or the Mystery Men of World War II are all examples of Meta-Talent heroes. Many fantasy settings have Meta-Talents as well, sometimes alongside more traditional mages, and if you're running a modern day game of supernatural intrigue and horror, your players might be creating demon-blooded or celestial-blessed Meta-Talent characters.

The Meta-Talent Trait

The core of this system is the Meta-Talent Asset. The full text of this trait is provided here.

Meta-Talented (d4/d8/d12)

Everyone has Skills, but not everybody has Skills the way that you do. Whether through super-science, superpowers, or the supernatural, your proficiency in one area of training or study extends beyond what is generally considered normal. Even if you do not have a high Skill rating, the potential for that Skill may disregard conventional thinking, or even reality itself.

When you're using your Meta-Talented Skill to do something outrageous or challenging, you enjoy a +2 Skill step—which helps offset the extra difficulty of such actions. The Game Master is encouraged to allow some spectacular window dressing on the results, even if the success doesn't accomplish anything more than it ordinarily would—it is purely cosmetic. Indeed, if you don't describe your use of the Skill in some entertaining fashion, the Game Master is entirely within his rights to deny you the bonus or drop it to +1. All results, whether successes or failures, are going to be much more spectacular than normal; a botched Meta-Talented Skill action may even cause significant environmental damage.

d4: Choose one Skill. Write "Meta-" in front of it on your character sheet.

d8: Choose two Skills. Write "Meta-" in front of them on your character sheet. The two Skills should be at least somewhat related to each other, reflecting a broader Meta-Talented area of ability.

d12: Choose three Skills. Write Meta-" in front of them on your character sheet. While all three Skills should have some thematic connection, at this level the connection may be quite obscure or esoteric. Choosing Athletics, Melee Weapons, and Unarmed Combat is a fairly obvious example (a Meta-Talent martial artist); choosing Drive, Influence, and Medicine is a little stranger (a Meta-Talent military ambulance driver).

In a pure Meta-Talent campaign, one in which all the player characters are assumed to be Meta-Talents of some sort, you should consider giving the d4 level of this Asset for free. Players who want characters to enjoy a broader area of Meta-Talent can then spend the difference in Trait points at character generation. Any significant supporting character or major antagonist should also have this Trait (for free, if the players do) and a supply of Plot Points for them to spend on stunts. If your campaign involves more than just Meta-Talents, then the Trait should be purchased in full as usual.

Meta-Talent Stunts

The other major element to a Meta-Talent campaign is the use of **stunts**. Like most aspects of window dressing, stunts are just a convenient story tool that builds on existing rules to accomplish something colorful and entertaining. A stunt is a Skilled action framed in a way that emphasizes the character's remarkable Meta-Talented abilities. You don't necessarily need the Meta-Talent system to include stunts in your game, but this section assumes you are.

When you spend Plot Points on a stunt based on your Meta-Skill you gain a +2 bonus to the total points spent. Thus, if you spend 1 Plot Point, it increases to 3 Plot Points, netting you a larger bonus die. This is the basic stunt resolution mechanic; if you're describing a fantastic maneuver or cinematic attack, your Plot Points stretch further.

Additional tricks and rule-breaking effects may also be accomplished with Plot Points and stunts. Here are a few examples of things your Game Master may allow in a Meta-Talented campaign.

Better, Faster, Stronger

Meta-Talents can usually exploit their superhuman abilities or magical enhancements for dramatic purposes and achieve significantly improved results. Usually, the +2 Skill step and the +2 Plot Point bonus (together with some cinematic description) reflect this, but sometimes you want a real showstopper. Better, Faster, Stronger is an effect you can add to any use of a Meta-Talent Skill. If a die comes up the maximum value when making a Meta-Talented Skill roll, you may spend a Plot Point to re-roll the die and add it to your total. Dice added by spending Plot Points in the usual manner are not subject to this effect.

One-Man Army

Meta-Talents who focus on combat and martial heroics often find themselves up against large numbers of mooks—unnamed, frequently faceless, yet always fanatical goons and henchmen. One Man Army essentially allows you to make one single attack roll using a Meta-Talent combat Skill against all mooks in reach by spending Plot Points to offset the multiple action penalties. For every mook past the first, spend 1 Plot Point. This effect takes up your entire turn, but you can dodge all of your mook attackers in response in the same manner without incurring any penalties.

The Glorious Hadouken

Sometimes the Meta-Talents incorporate secondary special effects that, while visually or conceptually startling, don't really have too much additional influence over the final result. However, there are times when you want them to, such as sprouting flaming wings as you leap

across a chasm with your Meta-Athletics, or crackling lightning along your blade as you clash with your foe. The Glorious Hadouken (from the Japanese 波動拳, "surge fist") is an effect you can add to the use of a Meta-Talent Skill. You decide what the secondary effect is—usually a kind of energy or sound or transformation—and spend a Plot Point. Even if you normally have a cosmetic effect surrounding your use of Meta-Talents, spending the Plot Point brings it fully into reality. Flaming punches really burn when making an attack with Meta-Unarmed Combat, shadows really gather around you when hiding with Meta-Covert, and so forth.

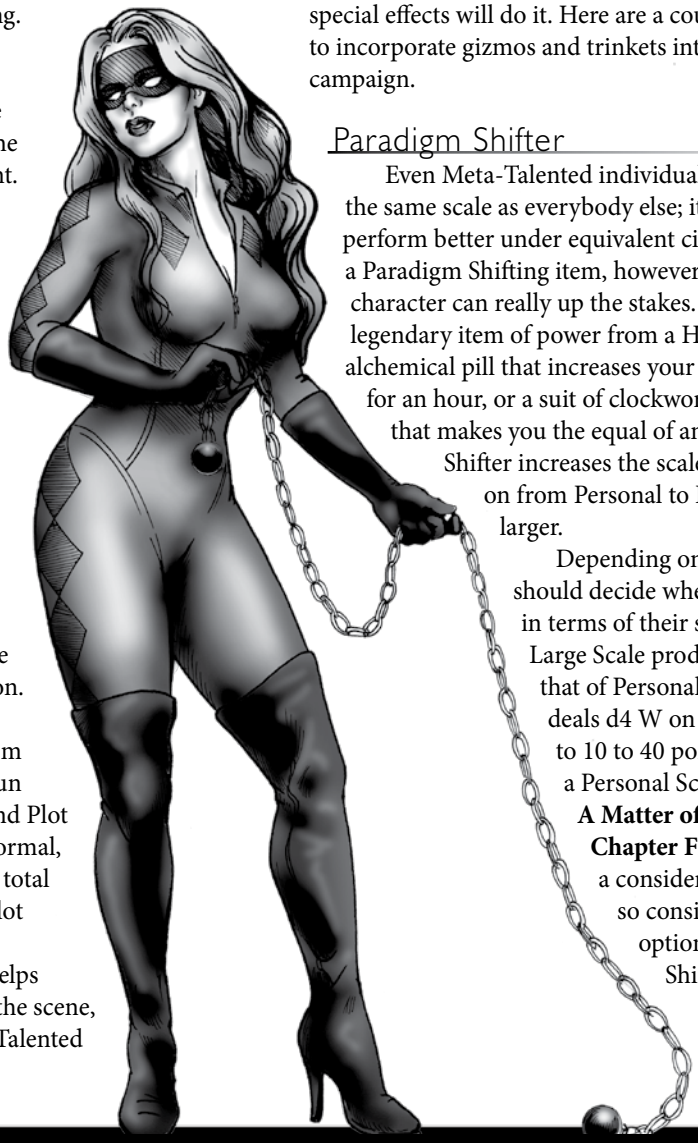
How this effect manifests is something you should decide with the help of your Game Master, but a good rule of thumb is to base it on your Meta-Talented Asset rating. The classic hadouken, a fireball-like range attack (Meta-Ranged Weapons) might do d4, d8, or d12 Wounds, while a shadowy blur increases the Difficulty to hit your character by the Trait Die.

Environmental Tool Chest

Ordinarily, you can spend a Plot Point or two to manage a little scene editing. Want a chair by the window? Spend a Plot Point. Want an old friend to conveniently live on the street where your character just got dumped by the mob? No problem; spend a Plot Point. Where Meta-Talents come in is that their scene editing is much more overt, beyond what mundane characters might accomplish. We call this stunt the Environmental Tool Chest.

In all the best wuxia martial arts movies, the protagonist doesn't just make use of his hands, feet, and occasionally a staff or sword to defeat his legions of foes. He uses his environment as a weapon, too. When carrying out an action with your Meta-Talent Skill, you may describe something in the immediate area to be a critical part of your action. It could be a stack of bricks in the corner, a length of chain hanging from the ceiling by a hook, or a series of fun house mirrors lining the room. Spend Plot Points to activate the scene edit as normal, but add a +2 bonus to the Plot Point total (just as you would when spending Plot Points to perform a basic stunt).

Once activated, the scene edit helps your character for the remainder of the scene, adding a +2 Skill step to your Meta-Talented actions. Because it's tied into your story, you won't lose the edit until the end of the scene or until another character (usually the bad guy) spends an equivalent number of Plot Points to eliminate it. You can do the same, of course, if the villain starts using scene edits to increase his Meta-Talent actions.



Meta-Talent Gear

Some people are Meta-Talented at such things as Craft, Science, or Mechanic. What does this mean? It means you can have a campaign filled with gadgeteers, mad scientists, and alchemists, of course. Much of the time, somebody with Meta-Mechanic or Meta-Science is going to just produce really well-made or quickly-assembled gear, or gear that *shouldn't* work by the look of it but which actually performs just as well as any other mundane item. Steam-powered flashlights, a car that runs on dairy products, or an alchemical blunderbuss can all be described with the same game statistics as their standard versions.

There are occasions when you really want to get that Meta-Talented feeling across, and neither stunts nor special effects will do it. Here are a couple of ideas for how to incorporate gizmos and trinkets into a Meta-Talents campaign.

Paradigm Shifter

Even Meta-Talented individuals operate on the same scale as everybody else; it's just that they perform better under equivalent circumstances. With a Paradigm Shifting item, however, a Meta-Talented character can really up the stakes. Whether it's a legendary item of power from a Hyborian age, an alchemical pill that increases your speed and strength for an hour, or a suit of clockwork armor and gears that makes you the equal of any tank, a Paradigm Shifter increases the scale that you operate on from Personal to Large Scale or even larger.

Depending on your campaign, you should decide where these items fall in terms of their scale adjustments. Large Scale produces results 10 times that of Personal Scale; a weapon that deals d4 W on Large Scale amounts to 10 to 40 points of Wound to a Personal Scale target (see the **A Matter of Scale** sidebar in **Chapter Five: Rules**). That's a considerable shift upward, so consider the following optional levels of Paradigm Shifting item:

- x2—**Impressive Scale**, twice the power of Personal Scale.
- x5—**Substantial Scale**, halfway between Personal and Large Scale.
- x10—**Large Scale.**
- x25—**Huge Scale**, one-quarter the power of Massive Scale.
- x50—**Enormous Scale**, halfway between Large Scale and Massive Scale.
- x100—**Massive Scale.**

With the finer granularity of scale, you can effectively introduce powered armor, alien monsters, dragon-slaying weapons, and many other truly impressive Meta-Talented items and have them interact at various levels. This can become quite a mathematical headache, so be sure to decide what scales are in play in your campaign and how you will deal with them.

Meta-Focus

A Meta-Focus item extends the power of your Meta-Talents even further, but in a narrow field. Each item is keyed to a Specialty Skill, and when employed by somebody who is Meta-Talented in the appropriate General Skill, the item grants an additional +1 Skill step. A Meta-Focus item must also be limited in some fashion, such as operating on fuel cells, prone to being lost or stolen, possessing a mind of its own, or drawing on the Meta-Talented character's own life force to work (perhaps causing d6 Stun whenever it is employed).

You might offer every Meta-Talented character in your campaign access to a Meta-Focus item, perhaps as a d2 Asset, or make them all incredibly rare. You could even present some Meta-Focus items that provide a greater Skill step than +1, but you risk the campaign becoming even more overpowered than it already is!

Cybernetics

Many campaigns, especially those based in science fiction or dystopic future settings, incorporate cybernetics. From robotic limbs to nanotechnology, steam-powered exoskeletons to techno-organic organs, the world of cybernetics in books, television, and movies is dizzyingly broad. At its core, however, cybernetics is about one thing—improving the frail mortal body with the wonders and advances of science and technology. Even if that science and technology in your campaign amounts to sorcery or alien DNA, this section lays out the groundwork for cybernetic player characters.

The Cyber-Enhancement Trait

This Asset is the basic cybernetic Trait, a general-purpose means of representing cybernetic enhancement. The description provided here is intended for the standard near-future Earth setting where cybernetics have become a part of life, but with some tweaking it would suit any campaign world that includes technology as a path toward superhuman endeavor.

Cyber-Enhancement (d4/d8)

You have had parts of your body replaced with cybernetic implants. After extensive surgery and grueling post-operative therapy, you are now gifted with enhanced Strength, Vitality, or some other Attribute. In addition,

Table 6.1: Cybernetic Assets

Assets	Examples
Attuned to Technology	Cybernetic uplink
Born Behind the Wheel	Vehicle interface
Constructed	Artificial body with organic brain
Danger Sense	Tactical computer
Enhanced Communication	Satellite comlink
Enhanced Manipulation	Prehensile cybernetic tentacles
Enhanced Movement	Legs replaced with hover unit
Enhanced Senses	Cybernetic eye
Fast Healer	Nanosurgeons in bloodstream
Fast on your Feet	Cybernetic legs
Hearty Constitution	Toxin suppressants
Head For Numbers	Analytical computer
Immune	Systemic antidotes
Inherent Armor	Dermal plating
Inherent Weapons	Retractable wrist blades
Intuitive Leaps	Cerebral cortex stimulator
Lightning Reflexes	Synthetic polymers
Photographic Memory	Digital optical recorder
Quick Learner	Adaptive neurocybernetics
Simple Needs	Organ replacements
Tough	Soft-tissue replacements
Unnatural Healing	Synthetic fuel inputs

if you purchase this Asset at a higher level, you gain a number of extra benefits that represent a more substantial cybernetic transformation.

d4: At this level, your cybernetics boost the performance of one of your Attributes. Add the Trait die to actions that are based on that Attribute.

Strength and Agility are both common choices, although any Attribute could be granted this benefit. You must determine what the nature of your enhancement is, and in what cases you are unable to access that boost. For instance, if you have a cybernetic arm that boosts Strength, then you would add the Trait die to an arm-wrestling contest, or a cyber-powered punch, but not to a spinning kick or when swimming laps. The Game Master may also determine that certain attacks or effects may target your cybernetics, such as electrical surges, giving them a +1 step in effectiveness. However, for the most part, your cybernetics are a part of you and no special rules are required at this level.

Table 6.2: Cybernetic Complications

Complications	Examples
Addiction	Requires stim injections
Amnesia	Can't remember life before cybernetics
Anger Issues	Poor response to threat stimulus
Complex Needs	Needs routine cybernetic maintenance
Dead Inside	Feels cut off from humanity
Duty	Agency who paid for cybernetics
Eerie Presence	Biofeedback field troubles others
Hooked	Obsessed with technology
Memorable	Odd appearance makes you stick out
Nonhealing	Can't heal naturally and needs repair
On the Run	Running from government or agency
Phobia	Terrified of surgery, doctors, etc.
Rival	An earlier prototype who hunts you
Traumatic Flashes	Situations trigger memories of past life
Ugly	Cybernetics are bulky and deforming
Unstable	Sanity is shaky since transformation

d8: At this level, you have had extensive cybernetic replacement. Synthetic polymers may have replaced your muscles, your blood may now be a stew of nanotech and proteins, and your skeleton may be composed of carbon-reinforced ceramics. You probably have a series of nanocomputers wired into your skull and vital organs, monitoring them for fatigue and stress, or perhaps a network of advanced monofilaments has replaced your nervous system, boosting your brain and reflexes.

This level of the Trait works like the previous level, but instead of adding the Trait die to one Attribute, you may divide the die into smaller dice that add up to 8 and spread it around your Attributes. Thus, you could add d4 to Strength and d2 to each of Vitality and Agility, or d2 to Intelligence and d6 to Alertness. This choice is fixed when you purchase the Trait. The Game Master may rule that with help from cybernetic engineers, you can re-assign the bonuses, but this should be time intensive (perhaps 48 hours of surgery and post-operative therapy), expensive (requiring outside funding) or both. As with the d4 level of this Trait, there may be some circumstances where the cybernetics won't apply.

In addition to the Attribute bonus, this level of the Trait is bundled with another Asset and a Complication that meet the setting's general perspective of cybernetics. See the section on Other Cybernetic Traits for examples. The two should be rated at the same level, effectively canceling each other out.

Other Cybernetic Traits

Chapter Three: Traits and Skills includes a number of Assets and Complications that are ideal for a campaign that includes cybernetics. Many of them may in fact be restricted in your campaign to cybernetics.

Tables 6.1 and 6.2 are not exhaustive. Use them as a guideline for the additional Asset and Complication included in the d8 level of the Cyber-Enhancement Trait. You can lump several of them together as a bundle, too, if you have decided that all cybernetic player characters will have those features. Or you can present the list to your players and have them pick and choose, buffet-style.

Psi Abilities

The powers of the mind make for a compelling campaign, whether in a fantasy setting, the modern day, or the far future. Sometimes, psychic powers are the exclusive province of a reclusive group or race, while in other cases a widespread global event triggers psi talents in a significant proportion of the population. Playing a psi character in a campaign may just be identical to playing a wizard in a fantasy setting, but for the most part a psi character has specific abilities and tricks that are common across multiple genres.

As with everything in this chapter, the decision must be made as to the nature and extent of psi abilities, and whether they are one example of a broader field of supernatural talents, or just represent the paranormal effects possible. Simply adding the basic rules presented here to a mundane campaign can make all the difference, especially when considering a horror or supernatural thriller campaign.

Psi Traits

Although there are multiple avenues toward a system of psionics, **Chapter Three: Traits and Skills** includes a handful of appropriate Assets. Each is discussed with some additional detail below. For your campaign, you may simply allow these Traits to be purchased separately, or you might require a "gateway" Asset, such as Psychic Talent d2, to make them available. If you go with the latter, this Asset should also allow the player character to add his Trait die to certain Skilled actions if they could benefit from a little psychic boost.

Enhanced Communication (Telepathy)

d4: Your psi talent might permit empathic communication with a specific animal or with other psi talents. You can get basic messages across, or read empathic signals from others.

d6: Level, you can actually communicate mind-to-mind at least with your own species, or with other psi talents, depending on the campaign's limits. This communication is not the same as talking, but you must know the language of the target, unless the target is also gifted with this level, at which point language is no barrier.

d10: Your telepathic powers are much stronger. You can plunge into a target's deeper thoughts, affect their senses, and carry out other more invasive actions. You can communicate mentally with multiple targets. You still need to share a common language, unless the target is also a psi.

d12: All communication is at full understanding with no language or species filter. You are also able to dominate other minds, carry on multiple conversations at vast distances, and even rewrite memories.

Enhanced Manipulation (Telekinesis)

d4: You can move small objects with your mind, turn keys in locks, agitate water in a glass, or bend a spoon. There's not much combat usefulness at this stage, but it's good for party tricks or as a supplement to burglars and craftsmen.

d6: You have the benefit of an additional psychic "limb" which functions just like your other ones. Essentially, anything you could normally manipulate, strike, lift, or push with your arm or leg, you can do with your telekinesis. This doesn't give you extra actions, but it means your arms and legs can be bound and you are still able to carry out certain tasks regardless.

d10: You can have multiple psychic limbs in place, or a single one at a much greater range. The range penalties for combat apply to most cases where you would want to manipulate or attack a target farther away than your immediate location, and multiple action penalties apply if you want to carry on multiple telekinetic tasks at once.

d12 Your telekinetic power is capable of transforming matter from one state to another, albeit with great effort. Physical properties such as mass become less of an obstacle to you, and you can essentially lift anything with your mind given the time and concentration. Few characters will have this degree of telekinesis.

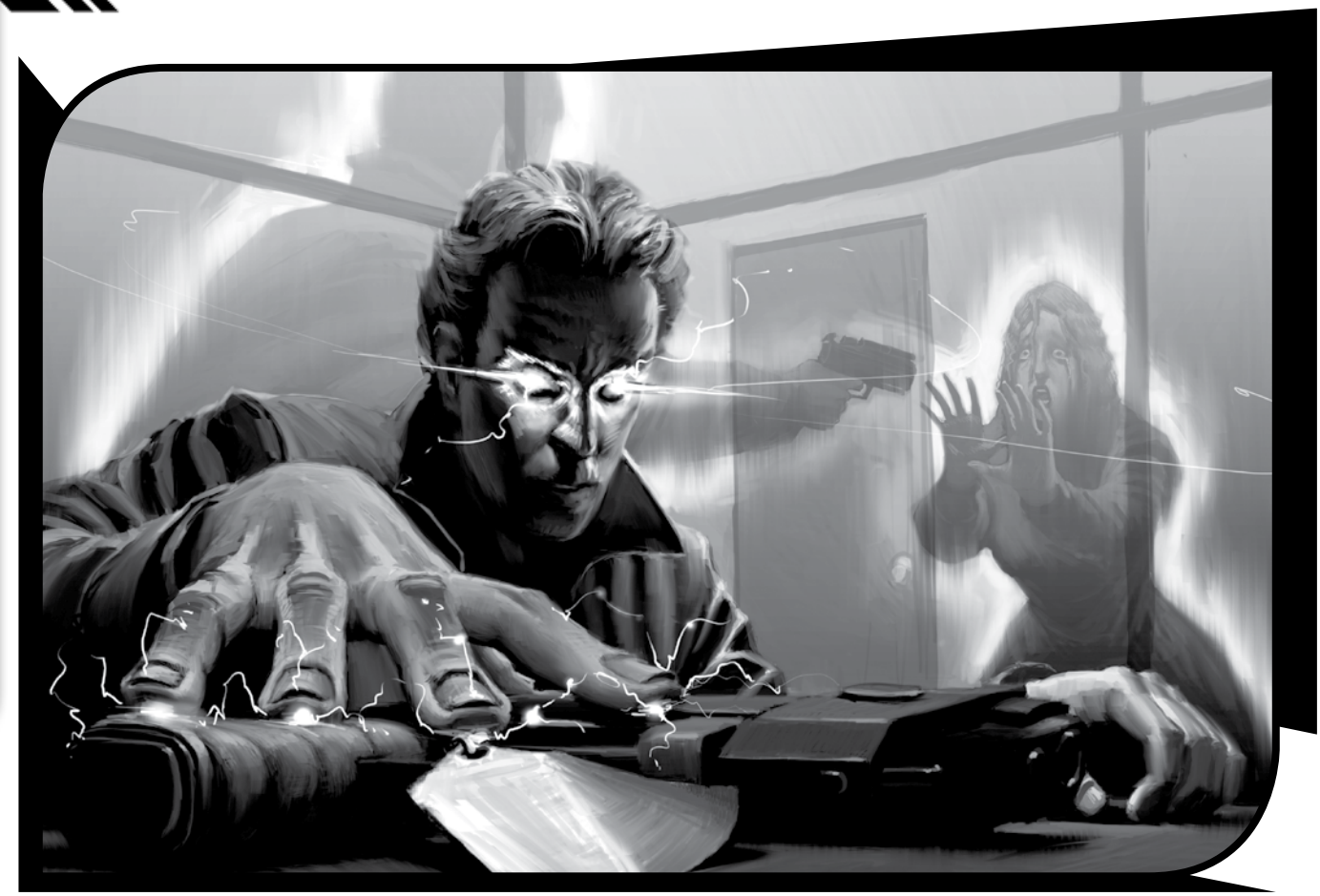
Enhanced Movement (Teleportation)

d4: You have mild space warping abilities. You can use your Trait to aid in dodging or blocking attacks, by simply not being where you were seconds ago. Add your Trait die to your defense to represent these micro-teleports. You can use these tricks to pocket small objects or disarm others, essentially adding the Trait die to Covert Skill actions or disarm actions. The distance involved is minor; no more than 12 inches, at most.

d6: You can teleport from place to place, though not farther than you would be able to move in one turn. You are effectively stepping into otherspace and walking through, or bending space around you; either way, it is not instantaneous, but can get around most obstacles. Certain limitations usually apply at this level, such as not being able to carry passengers, or not being able to teleport through walls. If you can see where you are going, you can teleport there, but you can't go anywhere you haven't been to or can't see. You are also able to use your abilities to dodge or avoid attacks as at the d4 level.

d10: Teleporting is a familiar means of getting around. With some effort or concentration, you can cross great distances—anywhere you can see with your own eyes or with visual assistance, you can reach. Alternatively, you can teleport back to very familiar locations anywhere in the world. Your short range teleporting is faster, almost instantaneous, but long distance teleporting may take as long as a minute to do. You are also able to take a number of people with you, so long as they are in contact with you.

d12 You can achieve instantaneous teleportation anywhere in the world, to any location you are familiar with or have studied. Your abilities allow almost instinctual shifting of space, aiding you not only in avoiding attacks but also in carrying them out. You can stab somebody through a hundred miles of space, if you know where they are, and can open miniature portals to other locations in order to send an object to or bring the object from those places.



Enhanced Senses (ESP)

d4: You have an attunement to environmental changes, allowing you to sense strong emotions, changes in temperature, psychic fields, and other phenomena. It's enough to give you an edge in most situations, but not enough to let you act without your normal senses. Add this Trait die to appropriate Perception-based Skill actions to represent you fine-tuning your visual, aural, or olfactory input.

d6: You are a scanner, capable of filtering out multiple sensory inputs and using others to replace them. This lets you read body language with accuracy, identify scents, tell when somebody is lying, or ignore a noisy bar's patrons to overhear a single conversation.

d10: You can replace most of your senses with your extra-sensory perception. You can locate an object or person in a room despite darkness, noise, or overwhelming smells. You can read newspapers and other printed matter by hyper-extending your sensory input to detect raised type. You can extend your normal senses to distant locations, temporarily shutting down your senses in your immediate area, so long as you are familiar with those locations. With effort, you can share the senses of another individual, "seeing" through their eyes or "hearing" through their ears.

d12: You no longer need any of your ordinary senses. Sensory input can be channeled into a single, filtered, and precise format. You are aware of anything in your immediate location, may ignore all penalties for range, visibility, and even cover (though you can't shoot around corners unless your weapon can.) You can share the senses of multiple individuals at any distance.

Keeping Psi in Check

Even more than magic, psi abilities can be abused in a campaign when firm limits are not set on what can and cannot be attempted. The suggestions given in Psi Traits are only guidelines; each psychic character has his or her own tricks and limitations. You should enforce the use of appropriate Complications, and consider using one of the following rules in your campaign to balance out the power of psi.

Psi Skill

Rather than simply allowing psi abilities to be used in a freeform manner or as a complement to other Skill actions, you may want to require that psi characters take Skilled actions to access their psychic potential. Add a Skill called Psi that requires a d2 Asset (such as the Psychic Talent Asset mentioned earlier in this section) before it may be purchased. Specialties for the Skill include Telepathy, ESP, Telekinesis, and Teleportation. Without any additional psi Traits, the Skill may be used as a general-

purpose knowledge Skill, or as a means of resisting psychic attack. With an appropriate Trait, however, the Skill allows the psi character to use the abilities that fall under that Trait's area.

Psychic Damage

Psi powers are amazing, but nobody can keep them up all the time. Each time a psi character uses his special abilities he accumulates Stun. The amount of Stun is equal to the level of the Trait used. Using a Trait at a lower level (such as using Enhanced Communication d12 to communicate empathically at the d4 level) reduces the Stun damage to that lower level. Stun is then recovered at the usual rate.

This mechanic is much like the strain of Channeling Magic discussed earlier in this chapter, and you might decide to provide gear that aids a psi in the same way that arcanite aids a channeling mage.

Psychic Power Pool

As an alternative to taking Stun, you might grant all psi characters a pool of points with which they power their psi abilities. This Psychic Power Pool is equal to the maximum values of Alertness + Willpower. An Asset that serves as the psi equivalent of Tough ("Iron Will" or something similar) may be provided as a means of increasing this pool. Each time a psi power is used, it costs a number of points from the Psychic Power Pool as the level of the Trait used. If there are not enough points in the pool, the ability cannot be used. Points replenish as quickly as Stun would normally be recovered from, or you may decide that the player character must rest or enter a meditative trance for a number of hours to restore spent points.

Psi Combat

A popular element of settings that include psychic abilities is telepathic combat. This can be represented very abstractly, or handled just like regular combat. You should decide how such a conflict is carried out.

Regardless of the style, the battle is carried out using paired Attribute + Psi Trait. Alternatively, use Attribute plus the Psi Skill (if you're using that option.) Play the battle out as usual, with successful attacks doing Stun damage only. You might make it deadlier, but the intent is usually to subdue or overpower one's foe, rather than kill them outright. A psi who raises the stakes in a duel is opening himself up to a great deal of risk, rather than a great deal of embarrassment.

Duel on the Astral Plane

With this method, all psi combat takes place on the higher plane of thought and psychic energy. Two combatants enter a kind of mental arena, forming ectoplasmic forms of their physical bodies. In this place, the mental Attributes serve as surrogates for the physical ones: Intelligence is Strength, Willpower is Vitality, and Alertness is Agility. Weapons are formed out of psychic energy, and the battle is joined. Use the standard combat rules, switching out the Attributes for all combat actions. Damage to the ectoplasmic bodies is transmitted directly to the physical one; either the wounds manifest on the body as if caused by real weapons, or all the damage is internal and psychic in nature. Either way, if you are killed on the Astral Plane, you die in the physical one.

Psychic Fireworks

In this variant, all psychic combat is flashy and visible to onlookers. The combatants manifest psychic weapons, or blast each other with vivid purple bolts of psi-power. Each combatant chooses a specific Trait to use as his "combat style." Enhanced Communication manifests as bolts of mental energy. Enhanced Manipulation summons objects made out of sheer will. Enhanced Movement relies on teleporting about, jabbing at the opponent with actual weapons, or using teleportation to crush the target in folded space. Enhanced Senses open up tactical options and hyper-senses that permit the psi to anticipate the opponent's moves and ready the best assault.

Regardless of the style, the battle is carried out using paired Attribute + Psi Trait. Alternatively, use Attribute plus the Psi Skill (if you're using that option.) Play the battle out as usual, with successful attacks doing Stun damage only. You might make it deadlier, but the intent is usually to subdue or overpower one's foe, rather than kill them outright. A psi who raises the stakes in a duel is opening himself up to a great deal of risk, rather than a great deal of embarrassment.

Credibility and the Courtroom Trial

Combat comes in many forms, and not all of them involve physical violence. In some stories, the drama and tension of conflict comes from a debate over an idea, and how credible the idea is. One classic example of this is the courtroom trial. You can use the rules in this section as a guideline for similar contests, using some or all of the stages of the trial to frame the action. These rules are especially useful in modern day campaign settings, such as TRACE (see **Chapter Eight: Example Campaigns**) or in games that involve intrigue, mystery, or legal process.

A courtroom trial is much like combat, during which both sides make attacks (or **statements**) against the jury's defenses. The basic currency of the conflict is **Credibility**, measured in points. If a statement succeeds it will remove Credibility Points from the opposition. The jury finds for the side that has the most Credibility at the end of the trial.

You are never aware of your level of Credibility, so you're never quite certain where you stand. The exception is if you have a jury consultant (see **Courtroom**).

Starting Credibility for the Prosecution starts at the maximum of the lead prosecutor's Willpower + Knowledge/Law. The defense's Credibility starts out as the maximum of the lead suspect's Willpower + Influence, with an appropriate Specialty (like Bluff). The Game Master should adjust these values as the story demands.

A trial consists of three phases: **Pretrial**, **Jury Selection**, and **Courtroom**. The length of these phases is dependent on the nature of the case, the degree to which the player characters are involved in any given phase, and dramatic license. Some campaigns focus on Pretrial and Courtroom and leave Jury Selection off-camera. Others begin with the investigation already over, and Jury Selection just beginning. You should decide for yourself what best suits your story.

Crucial Skills

Three main types of skills are useful in a trial: Investigation, Procedural, and Persuasive.

Investigation skills

Perception (Intuition, Investigation, or Sight)
Discipline (Interrogation or Intimidation)
Influence (Interrogation or Intimidation)
Covert (Streetwise)

Procedural skills

Knowledge (Law)
Artistry (Appraisal)
Influence (Administration or Bureaucracy)

Persuasive Skills

Influence (Persuasion or Interrogation)
Knowledge (Law)
Perception (Intuition)
Performance (Oratory)

Pretrial

This stage of the trial consists of investigation, pretrial motions, and research.

During the trial, the prosecution (or plaintiff, if it's a civil case) and defense will bring witnesses and evidence to bear. Your side may deliver one statement for each item of Physical Evidence and each Witness, giving you the chance to remove Credibility from your opponent. Thus, you want as many pieces of evidence and witnesses as possible. All evidence at this stage is Physical Evidence. Witnesses include Eyewitnesses, Character Witnesses, and Expert Witnesses.

Investigation

Investigation provides Physical Evidence and Eyewitnesses, and uses the investigation Skills listed earlier in this section. Each Skill may only be used once, with the exception of Perception/Investigation, which may be used three times. The Difficulty to recruit a witness or locate a piece of Physical Evidence is Average. In some cases, especially when the investigators are pressed for time and it's simply a matter of locating the evidence or witnesses sooner rather than later, this can be a complex action with an Average Threshold. Each roll on the complex action represents a length of time—an hour, a day, a week—based on the nature of the story. The rolls reflect the work and role playing that are going on during the Investigation phase.

Perception-based rolls yield Physical Evidence; all others produce Eyewitnesses.

If a Skill action comes up as an extraordinary success, you gain one Technicality to be used later.

Pretrial Motions can nullify some of your opponent's Physical Evidence and Eyewitnesses. Important skills include Knowledge/Law and Influence/Persuasion. For each witness or piece of evidence your opponent has, you may make a Skilled action using one of your procedural Skills. Each Skill may only be used once, with the exception of Knowledge/Law, which may be used three times. The Difficulty of a Pretrial Motion is Hard and each successful action removes one of you opponent's Witnesses or Physical Evidence (and any Technicality that came with it).

Research can obtain up to five Expert Witnesses or Character Witnesses. Only the Defense may use Character Witnesses (see Courtroom for details) but Expert Witnesses are obtainable by either side. Research usually uses a Skill related to the Expert Witness' field, in order to recruit the right person, while standard investigation Skills may turn up a Character Witness. The Difficulty is Average.

Investigation is something that may be role played by player characters in a police unit. In a standard modern-day procedural drama campaign, you should always offer that opportunity, as it can increase the enjoyment of the overall story. If your campaign is predominantly concerned with the courtroom drama of the trial itself, however, then you can easily use this more abstract system.

Jury Selection

A jury consists of three defenses: Willpower, Alertness, and Intelligence. One is rated at d4, another at d6, and the last at d8. Each defense amounts to an area of Credibility that may be targeted by a statement. Willpower handles statements grounded in emotion or feelings. Alertness handles statements that center on the way evidence looks, the way the case has been presented, or the appearance of witnesses. Intelligence covers statements that rely on logic, science, or reasoning.

For Jury Selection, the two sides make opposed Knowledge/Law actions. The winner of the opposed action may decide that a particular die may not be used for one of the three defenses.

The Game Master randomly determines the Jury's disposition, and then changes it if it violates the results of Jury Selection.

Example: The Prosecution, represented by the player characters, wins the Jury Selection roll. They decide that the jury's Intelligence cannot be d8. The Game Master has already randomly determined that the jury would be Alertness d6, Intelligence d8, and Willpower d4. He changes it, so that Intelligence is now d4 and Willpower is d8. This jury is now especially susceptible to logical, rational arguments, and is very resistant to tugging heartstrings.

Courtroom

The Prosecution goes first. For each Witness and piece of Physical Evidence, the Prosecution makes an argument to the jury, represented by a Skilled action. The Game Master determines what Skill the player rolls based on what argument he's making. If the Witness or Physical Evidence is especially persuasive—a Smoking Gun, a photograph, a credible witness who claims to have "seen the whole thing" and remembers it "like it was yesterday," etc., the Game Master may grant a Skill step of +1 to as much as +4, if the Witness or Physical Evidence is especially damning (fingerprints, DNA, etc.)

The existence of such credible witnesses and damning evidence is purely up the Game Master. If the investigation was role played rather than rolled for, the results carry over to this step (minus pretrial motions, of course—subject to Game Master approval.)

The Attribute used depends on the type of argument being made. If the argument appeals to the jury's logic or reason, usually involving Physical Evidence, it is a Logos-based argument—use the lawyer's Intelligence. If the argument is based on Witness testimony, it's an Ethos-based check—use the lawyer's Alertness. If the argument tugs at the jury's heartstrings, such as a Character Witness, it's a Pathos-based argument; use the lawyer's Willpower.

Once the Prosecution makes his argument, the Defense can Cross-Examine. Roll on the same skill the Prosecution did, but use the Jury's Attribute die (Intelligence for Logos, Alertness for Ethos, and Willpower for Pathos) rather than the defense lawyer's.

The difference between the Prosecution's roll and the Defense's roll is how much Credibility the Defense loses.

Once the Prosecution is through all its Witnesses and Physical Evidence, the tables turn. It's the Defense's turn to go through their witnesses and evidence, with the Prosecution cross-examining.

Jury Consultants

If you have the resources, you can hire a Jury Consultant, giving you a hint at the jury's disposition, or how much Credibility you have versus your opponent. How good the Consultant is depends on how much you pay.

Technicalities

During the Courtroom phase of the trial, either side may play one of their Technicalities. Roll a Hard (11) Knowledge/Law, Influence/Administration, or Influence/Bureaucracy action. If successful, the Technicality is brought into play.

Examples of Technicalities include:

- **Surprise Witness!** Add one witness that your opponent cannot cross-examine.
- **I Object!** Throw out one of your opponent's witnesses.
- **Dueling Experts:** Use your Expert Witness to remove the effects of one of your opponent's.
- **Dirty Trick:** You pull something completely unethical and possibly illegal. Jury Nullification, The Race Card, or Plan B, it's completely slimy and loathsome, but it's very effective. Step bonus of +2 on this roll, but you could be in disbarment trouble if it doesn't work...
- **Blackmail the Judge:** Hey, it worked in The Untouchables...

Summation

A lawyer's closing argument is his last chance to impact the jury. Whether the player makes an impassioned speech or just goes over his major points is up to both him and the style of play used for the trial—but in general it can be used to appeal to the jury one last time by driving home an important point. Treat it just like witness testimony, though the Game Master is encouraged to reward or punish based on how effective the final argument may (or may not!) seem.

Deliberation and Decision

If one side has far more Credibility than the other, deliberation may not last long at all (though for a complex cases it usually takes at least a few hours). Ultimately whichever side has the most Credibility will win, and such will be announced by the jury foreman. But even if you lose, you can always appeal!

CHAPTER 7
BUILDING WORLDS AND TELLING TALES

If you look around any table of gamers, there is one person sitting there behind a divider with a stack of notes and a knowing look. That person is the Game Master. Without the Game Master, there is no game. We're assuming for this chapter that this person is you.

You bring together the ideas for the adventures, come up with the challenges in front of the player characters, play the supporting characters they meet, and describe the world the characters find themselves in. It isn't an easy job, but for the creative mind it can be very rewarding. The satisfaction of creating something for the enjoyment of your friends is hard to beat, seeing their eyes light up when reward is mentioned, their groans when the villain slips away from them, even the humor they bring to the table. It makes the time invested in preparation worth it.

This chapter covers important territory for a Game Master of the Cortex System. It starts with an introduction to campaign concepts and embracing a genre. Cortex is a flexible system and exists to serve more than one setting; establishing the world's stage is a critical first step. Character creation is next, describing the key factors when helping players make their characters. The heart of this chapter is the creation of adventures, from campaign plots to individual scenes. This leads into the three of many possible genres presented in this book: Fantasy, Modern, and Science Fiction. The chapter ends with aspects of running a game using the Cortex System.

It's quite a bit of information, but you can read it as you find time. If you're an experienced Game Master already, you might already know much of what this chapter offers. That's fine. Most things are suggestions for enhancing your game and can be applied after the campaign starts rolling. Just keep your focus on having fun, for yourself and your players, and you'll be OK.

The Role of the Game Master

So what are you getting into if you agree to be a Game Master using our game engine? Cortex is fast and easy to learn. You don't need to spend half an hour creating the stats for an important supporting character, which leaves you with more time to concentrate on the fun part of creating memorable stories.

In general, your tasks are the same as they are in any other role playing game. You bring the world to life for the players, present them interesting situations, act out the parts of supporting characters, adjudicate tests of Skills, and run combat. You will need to describe the places the player characters go, serving as their eyes and ears. Plot twists and action scenes are your bread and butter, orchestrating the characters through setbacks and triumphs, rising tension and ultimate resolutions.

The best advice for beginning Game Masters is to be flexible. If the players are stumped, give them a roll to notice something, or adjust the facts just enough to get them moving again. Be supportive of the players' ideas on nudging the plot with their Plot Points, or in role playing the various sides of their characters. Give them challenges but also give them plenty of rewards.

Setting up a Campaign Concept

You can run a quick one-shot adventure, a four-hour tournament game, or multi-session story. If you plan for the players to keep their characters for a while, several sessions in a row, or across multiple adventures, you are creating a campaign. A campaign is just a series of connected adventures with the same main characters. They don't have to have an over-arching plot behind them, but they often have a theme that runs through each adventure. The adventures in a campaign generally stick to the same setting and genre; a series of cases for the same Criminal Investigation team, for instance, or an ongoing five-year mission for a deep space exploration vessel.

Campaigns are particularly attractive for gaming groups because the players get to know their characters better and the campaign world better. Their characters grow over time, accumulating new Skills, money, a reputation, or even a string of colorful stories to tell around the tavern hearth when it is all over.

Think about the kind of campaigns you'll enjoy creating and then discuss what you have in mind with your players. Let the group give you some feedback and input. When they have a hand in picking the general tone and direction of the game, you've got their buy-in. As long as everyone is open to the campaign setup and genre you're proposing, you can start gathering ideas for the campaign. It has to be something that you're interested in or creating the campaign will just be a chore and the game won't get very far.

You don't have to have every detail hammered out before you start character creation, but have an idea of the kinds of adventures you think will make up the bulk of the campaign: combat, investigation, mysteries, exploration, etc.

Understanding Genre

The Cortex System is designed to support the mood and flavor of different genres using the same core rules system. This makes moving from game to game easy and everyone's proficiency with the game style builds up over time. Trait lists can be put together to give the players incentives to embrace both the stereotypes of the genre as well as break out of the molds. For example, in a modern crime drama such as TRACE in **Chapter Eight: Example Campaigns**, it would be remiss to have an available Traits list that didn't have Anger Issues as one option. The bad-with-people cop and the divorced or estranged private detective are both crime-story icons.

So when you select the genre for your campaign and get your players' buy-in, consider what an adventure in that genre really means. You don't want to play with stereotypes and nothing else, but they should comprise a healthy part of the campaign. Without stereotypes and clichés, a genre would lose much of its flavor. What would a noir murder mystery do without the stunning blonde socialite and the corrupt cops? I think we can agree that fantasy without swords and sorcery, or science fiction without high-tech weapons and faster-than-light spaceships just doesn't fit the bill.

When you've chosen your genre, make a list of the elements that comprise the genre. If any of your players aren't familiar with the genre, share these notes with them so they get an idea of what you're trying to create. Here are some categories you can use to define a genre.

Inspiration: Is there a movie, television show, or book that you are using as inspiration for the campaign? The campaign doesn't have to be set in that world, but perhaps the mood and some of the details carry over. A movie or TV show is helpful since a player can rent a copy and watch it if they aren't familiar with it. From the sample campaigns, you'll note that the *Star of the Guardians* series by Margaret Weis was written after the Star Wars film trilogy raised some interesting questions in her mind. The TRACE example setting is an amalgamation of popular crime dramas geared to serve the needs of role playing game.

Player Character Roles: Icons and stereotypes. Who are the heroes or protagonists of the genre? Who are the faithful sidekicks and romantic companions? This list will help the players think of good characters that will help get them into the action.

Motivations: What drives these characters to adventure? It could be their chosen profession, a destiny thrust upon them, a quest for revenge, or something else entirely. What are the most common drivers in the genre?

Classic Supporting Characters: As iconic as the Player Character Roles, enemies and other characters have established roles as well. While changing things up is usually good to keep something fresh, a genre campaign wouldn't run as richly without the classic villains, patrons, or allies.

Locations: What places come to mind when you think of the genre? Make a list of them, dangerous and helpful, colorful and drab, to see how the adventures can run through those places.

Plots: When you consider the genre, there will likely be some famous examples of high-level plots. Some of these might be too well known to use exactly, but often they are instances of classes of plots that can be used in fresh ways. List plots that are iconic to the genre, even if you later choose one that isn't on the list.

Goals: More immediate goals comprise the bulk of the driving force of a campaign. In the selected genre, what are the heroes usually trying to accomplish? Unraveling mysteries, defeating hostile forces, discovering lost treasures, or something else? Again, this list will influence the adventures you create in the campaign but it shouldn't prohibit drawing in new goals if they fit your campaign.

Events: An event usually is something that tests the characters, either through role playing or Skill challenges, to achieve a short-term purpose. These are the scenes, the building blocks of adventures and the campaign overall. They should be the easiest to identify. Cops interrogating a suspect, adventurers looking for a secret entrance to an ancient tomb, pilots navigating the hazards of space flight are all examples of iconic events.

Challenges: What will you throw at the heroes as they try to succeed in the events, goals, and even the over-all plot? What are the environmental hazards you associate with the genre? Do they need to worry about politics and the mood of the head of government? With whom do they do battle and who are their rivals?

Rewards: Vitally important in a campaign is producing a pay-off when the players succeed through all the challenges thrown at them. In the genre, what is considered the fruits of victory? Is it treasure or the recognition of their peers? Is it saving someone or seeing justice done? Defeating a dire enemy or performing deeds unmatched by others? Remember that along with these main rewards, a good campaign will also give the players opportunities to find satisfaction with their individual motivations.

Portraying the World or Universe

As Game Master, you present the world around the characters in every way. Try to bring that world to life with thoughtful descriptions of people and places. Think of the colors, smells, and weather that make a place feel real. Describe the smiles and scowls, hard-working Joes and their shady counterparts.

Always keep your genre in mind. If you're running a noir crime drama, the city is grim and usually gray or dark. Not a lot of happiness around. A crime story in a sunny place like Los Angeles will have more people in bathing suits and glamorous movie stars.

What you decide to describe and what you leave out can have effects on the players' actions and reactions. There isn't a way for you to describe everything their characters would actually see or hear or sense, so what you tell them is already what the characters deem important, what they notice.

Creating Characters

Characters are the focal point of all role playing. Like actors on the stage, nothing much happens without them. The character creation process has a few steps but should be approached in a fluid or iterative fashion. Choices made at an early step might need to be adjusted to support later decisions.

The Game Master should set the starting scope for character creation based on the Campaign Concept chosen earlier. The setting will affect what Traits, Skills, and gear is available for players to choose from. Summarizing the Campaign Concept for the players helps them understand what sort of characters would be fun to play and what types would likely be left out of the action more often. A campaign about a special unit in a police department would encourage the players to create logical members of that team. Other characters are possible, but they might be left behind more often than the player will enjoy, or take more work on the part of the Game Master to weave them in.

The type of adventures the Game Master plans on running can affect things as well. If the game is to be fast-paced and full of heroic swashbuckling, characters should have some Skills or motivations to support that. A grimmer, more determined series of adventures calls for more angst in the characters and less civilized talents.

Finding the Concept

As Game Master, your job is to help your players create characters they will enjoy playing in the selected genre campaign. Coming up with a good concept is the core to the whole character creation process. Like a sculptor revealing the elephant hidden in the block of marble, a strong concept lets your player chip away every option that isn't right for the character.

The concept doesn't have to be perfect from the start. Many characters develop through the selection of an unexpected Trait or as game play unfolds. But there should be a core idea that explains why they are in the campaign and what they are seeking. Some of the most colorful characters of literature begin as innocent bystanders and are drawn into the adventures from befriending the hero (Sam in the *Lord of the Rings*), aiding them at a crucial moment (Han Solo in *Star Wars*), or even just tagging along for perceived protection (Donkey in *Shrek*).

Have the player write down the concept and share it with you. Consider if you can successfully weave the character into the campaign as you see it or without major alterations. If you think the player won't have fun with the character for what you have in mind, let them know that and give them the opportunity to consider changing it or coming up with something completely different.

Traits & Motivations

It's a common refrain. "I have to play a character for several sessions before I get a sense of them and how they would act." The Cortex System allows you to get a head start on developing that personality and those motivations during character creation. Players no longer have to walk on to the stage with just a costume and a set of Skills. They start with things to be proud of and things they'd rather not talk about. While the greater plot is likely beyond their ken to start, they have their personal motivations as a guide to dealing with what they encounter. It's these motivations and the Traits that inspire them that help a player get into role playing the character from the very start of the game.

To be sure, other motivations may develop during game play, but drawing some motivations from the Traits the player selects is a great way to get started.

Our heroes have finally tracked down the man who has been causing them no end of trouble. It is revealed that he is a notorious but well-connected gangster. The players are somewhat stumped as there really isn't a best course of action considering how much trouble they would get in for harming him. As the leaders in the group discuss their options, Johnny picks up the phone and calls the police. He announces who they've caught and where they are before setting the receiver back down.

Johnny's player acted on his Duty Trait, even though it made the group's options from there much more limited. Since this was such a pivotal moment, the Game Master rewards Johnny's player with two Plot Points to use at another time.

Traits are primarily presented to affect game-play by changing die rolls or even letting you use Plot Points to alter events in a subtle way. This is a power game dynamic that you should encourage the players to utilize. Just as powerful is the way Traits can help create motivations for the character. While characters may adopt motivations unrelated to their Traits, most will find at least some that line up.

Complications provide the easiest hunting ground to find a good motivation. Most will pop out at you just by reading the Complication's description. Since Complications are primarily meant to affect role playing

they are trying to give you preferences, desires, and dislikes. Remember, a motivation is a personal reason to act, or react, in a particular way. Often, these actions can move cross-purposes to the group's adventure goals and that's half the fun. Here is a list of some of the Complications presented in the Cortex System and the motivations they might inspire.

Addiction: You're hooked. A few, with strong wills, get the motivation to break their addiction. Others are simply driven to keep themselves supplied, and even get others hooked so they don't feel so bad for "using" alone.

Allergy: A serious allergy can be life-threatening. A hint or hope of a cure would be a powerful motivator. Even if there isn't a cure, you are likely going to be on the look-out for medicines to keep it under control.

Amorous: Being randy isn't all fun and games. Sometimes it's a job hunting down new conquests to brag about, or a motivating challenge to overcome a frosty response.

Anger Issues: Perhaps you're the daredevil, taking on unnecessary challenges just to show everyone that you're tough/skilled/brave. You're trying to prove something, what is it? Is there some recognition that will satisfy you?

Convict: Having a criminal record rarely tells the whole story. Was it for a real crime or were you framed? Do you seek revenge or to resume your criminal career? Will others seek you out for their own brand of justice or to draw you back into the "old life"? The motivation is to resist or pursue that life.

Dead Broke: The logical motivation here is to get "un-broke." You might be very focused on getting paid or finding treasure, even though it proves a temporary respite. Even rampant thievery might be a motivating option for you. Consider what is causing the condition: debts, a wastrel lifestyle, or other obligations? Perhaps you are devoted to a person or cause to whom you send most of your money. This would dovetail interestingly with other Traits like Duty or Faith.

Duty: Motivations are important with this Complication. Do you embrace your duty with idealistic fervor or are you committed against your will? Did you undertake an obligation to please another, by government mandate, or by your own will? Has the focus of the duty turned out to be what you envisioned or something less? The choice can make a lot of difference in how you react, and how easy the duty is to bear.

Greedy: This Complication is a bare motivation, a reason to seek money by hook or by crook. Still, one could wonder what instilled this greed in you. Is it hedonism, the lust for power, a means for security, or perhaps to get funding for a "greater good"?

Infamy: There are only two things to do with a bad name: take advantage of it or try to get rid of it. Either way, you've found a motivation to either continue doing what earned you the black mark or to do good deeds in hopes of erasing it from the judging minds of others.

Out for Blood: Will you use your rage for other ends (intimidation, fear, power) or will you resist it at all costs? Better to know where you stand than be its simple plaything.

Pacifist: So you won't fight. But why not? Is it a spiritual conviction, an attempt to purify your soul, or an oath of honor? Are you avoiding a past of melee that you don't want catching up to you? The reasons will affect how you act with this Complication.

Rebellious: You've got their attention, now why did you do it? Are you avoiding rank and responsibility by giving people excuses to keep you down, even if your Skills deserve promotion? Are you a member of an often-oppressed group where rebellion has become a way of life? Understanding the source can help you flavor how you act out.

Rival: He's coming for you. Now do you want to kill him, humiliate him, or convince him that it was all a big mistake? Each is a very different way to respond.

Assets aren't intended to cause you trouble, but they can still lend some flavor and depth to the character's personality. The following are suggestions and it is up to the player how much these might affect their choices.

Allure: Growing up a beauty or blossoming later has an effect on how a person acts. Do you crave attention and recognition of your looks? Are you afraid of losing them? Do you find it easier to charm everyone than discern who might end up being bad company later? Perhaps you are motivated to be acknowledged and lauded for your looks, obsess about beauty products to keep what you have, or keep picking up unsavory friends.

Contacts: These friends have loyalty to you. Do you have it to them? There might come times when circumstances demand a choice between the player character group's goals and keeping faith with these loyal friends or their ideals. The stronger the bond with these allies, the less you are motivated to break their "rules."

Destiny: Some embrace a greater role for themselves with almost messianic zeal, transforming their lives and viewing all things through the prism of their own importance. Others will fear their Destiny and try everything to keep it a secret, or avoid it all together.

Faith: Belief can be a quiet thing, personal and unspoken, something the character might not enjoy being asked about. It can also be worn like a many-colored coat, attracting the like-minded and driving away unbelievers.

Hideout: Having a safe house or bolthole somewhere is evidence of a person who knows he may need it some day. How do you act that would make such a thing

necessary? Are you a thief or enemy of the state? Are you overly paranoid or extremely possessive about your wealth?

Natural Leader: You have a gift to lead others, to inspire them. Are you motivated to use it or must you be forced to do so? Have you seen the perils of power too closely and don't trust yourself? Do you have a cause or devotion to which you apply this gift of yours? Aiding that cause would be a logical motivation. Perhaps you believe that your gift makes you special, better than everyone else.

Shadow: You're already hard to track down. Now think why that is. Was it necessary due to events in your past? What must you do to keep your past from becoming your present? Paying special attention to avoiding notice or favoring disguises and aliases might be part of your motivations.

Uncommon Knowledge: Secret knowledge is a catalyst. You might be motivated to learn even more or to keep what you know a secret. It might be more important to you to let as many others know the secret as you can.

After all these suggestions, it might be tempting to make a very deep, conflicted character with many motivations. Don't forget that the game is important as well. If the character is constantly foiling the efforts of his friends because of these motivations, the game will quickly lose its fun quickly. A few well-chosen motivations are better than many in most cases. It helps the player focus. More motivations will develop during game play so leave the character some room to grow.

It might also seem logical to have the motivations align well, so that every motivation and Trait supports the others. Remember that people, and thus characters, can be strange and sometimes conflicted creatures. It is possible to have motivations that are at cross-purposes, but that makes it more fun to use them in game play.

Character Background

Where you come from is often more important than who you are in this world. A character's race, religion, affiliations, and economic class affect how they are perceived, what areas of society they move freely in and where he might have trouble. His background influences the sort of Skills he picked up along the way or how his personal character was formed (Traits).

A background can also be used to explore some of the aspects of a genre. If a fantasy campaign has a particular religion as a primary force in the world, having a character from the religion or even part of the religious organization would go far to weaving them into the fabric of the campaign. In a noir crime drama campaign, characters with angst and a clouded past are the order of the day.

Handling the Numbers

Characters in the Cortex System are not randomized. Creation is based on pools of points, modified by your choices. The more points the Game Master awards for creation, the more experienced and powerful your character will be. There is advancement, but it is not as transformative as with other game systems.

Your role as Game Master is to aid the players in the mechanics of character creation and to give them guidance for avoiding a character that won't be fun to play in the campaign. If a character is built to be the best at a particular Skill, you need to make sure the use of that Skill figures prominently into the campaign. If it won't, let the player know that up front. A hotshot pilot might be frustrating to play if flying is only rarely encountered in the game.

During game play, handling the numbers is pretty quick. When dice need to be rolled, you simply pick the most logical Attribute and Skill while the player looks to see if any of his Traits can help them by adding a Trait die to his roll. You can be flexible if he doesn't have the exact Skill but have another one that is related, though you might assign a small penalty. On your side, you have to select the Difficulty and see if there is any factor in the game world that will modify that number.

It is worth the time to study the combat section, reading it thoroughly. If you can quickly determine difficulty modifiers, it will help the combat run much more smoothly and help the players keep the focus on the characters and looking in the rulebook.

Character Generation Example: Working with the Players

"All right," begins Harry, the Game Master. "You're all members of the new Los Angeles organized crime task force. You belong originally to any number of departments, or you're a civilian if your expertise makes sense. Remember that you'll be investigating crimes, using undercover officers, and trying to put together a case that will take down the Mob. Piece of cake, right?"

Harry continues. "We're using the Cortex System so character generation is pretty easy. Think about what kind of character you want to play and then we can discuss various Assets and Complications your character might have. Attributes and Skills will flow from the concept of the character."

The players look through their copies of the Cortex System Role Playing Game Core Book and ask questions about the setting.

"The time frame is 1949, four years after the war. Organized crime became a rampant problem in the city during the war and your group is the first attempt to

attack the problem across divisions and departments. Technology will be appropriate for the time, so no cell phones or computers. Characters with a war background are fairly easy to envision in this, either as cops or as individuals with particular knowledge of the Mob and a reason to try and take them down."

"Remember, the tone is noir, so things will be gritty out there. Tough talk and slang are great if you feel like using them."

Joanna speaks up first. "How about this: a woman who is the wife of a politician. To most people she is the proper socialite, attending charity functions and going out to the clubs. Unknown to the public, her brother was killed by the Mob and she turned informant to the Police to exact some sort of revenge."

"That's pretty good," says Harry. "She brings the team information from a different level of society, from someone sort of on the inside. We'll have to make sure things are set up in such a way that she can participate regularly. Don't want you left behind all the time."

"I think we can work that out," she says. "I really like the concept." Harry nods and Joanna starts looking at the Traits list.

"If its noir, then you need a wise-cracking tough guy," offers Brian. "I'm thinking of a cop who is a war vet. He gets by okay but isn't going anywhere fast. Maybe he was stuck on this new task force to get him out of his captain's hair." Harry agrees, making a private note that this character might be a mole, even unknowingly, by corrupt forces within the police department.

"She'll definitely have the Wealthy Asset and I see her being a knock-out too, so I'm picking Allure," mentions Joanna. "For problems, I think she's Out for Blood. When pushed, she gets cold and silent and is likely to shoot to kill. And she's got a twin sister who's a family disgrace, so I'll take Duty to account for her causing problems."

"This is going to be fun," laughs Harry.

"I'm having a hard time coming up with a concept," confessed Jeff. "I just keep going back to Phillip Marlowe, that sort of loner private dick kind of character, but I don't see how that fits into the campaign."

"Well, let's see," says Harry, thinking. "Perhaps that's the kind of guy he has been but he has some reason to join the Task Force as a civilian auxiliary or something. He could be the guy from the outside who knows police corruption all too well. Just have to find a reason he'd join up with them against the Mob."

"Maybe they killed a relative of mine," suggested Jeff. "They led my brother down the road of gambling and debts and then killed him when he couldn't pay up. No, make it a buddy I was close to in the war, someone that wouldn't automatically be linked to me without some serious digging."

"I think that's got some good legs," Harry says.

Brian asks Harry to talk in private. "For my tough cop, I found Brawler, Formidable Presence, and Two-Handed Fighting. He tried boxing when he got back from the war but was double-crossed and set up by the Mob. He prefers to use his fists when a gun isn't necessary. He's got Anger Issues and he's Crude. He also has a Duty to the police department who he believes saved him from the gutter. So he'll be loyal to the others in the group though they can figure that out over time. He's also a Klepto and has a tendency to make off with a little evidence when he can. He's kind of ashamed of it and will definitely hide it from the others. I'd also like to use the Uncommon Knowledge Asset, knowing something relevant to the Organized Crime case, but maybe an angle none of us suspect is there. For example, if the Chinese are involved, maybe he knows how to negotiate the Chinese underworld. Something like that."

"Okay, I'll give it some thought and get back to you with the details. But it sounds good to me," replies Harry.

Returning to the table, the fourth and last player is ready with his concept. "It looks like this crew needs someone to keep them in line, keep things running by the book," begins Mark. "If it's okay with the others, I want my guy to be a cop and in charge of the task force. I see him as an Eliot Ness type although naive about politics and corruption. He can get outmaneuvered but will never accept corruption."

Looking around the table, the other players agree and Mark returns to the book to study the Traits.

"Okay, so if you have your Traits, add up the positive and negative bonuses to see how much it changes your total to buy stats."

"What level are we?"

"You're all veterans so that's 48 Attribute points, 68 Skill points, and 4 free Trait Points."

The group continues to work up their characters, selecting Attribute levels and Skills. Harry thinks about how he's going to tailor his general campaign concept to fit these characters well. He goes through them one by one.

Mark will be the sergeant of the task force, in charge and reporting to the Captain on results, requesting funds and various permissions. Harry knows that the Captain will definitely be using him, but he'll always put on a face of honesty to keep Mark off the trail. Eventually, the team will realize that someone is leaking their plans to the enemy, letting the big fish get away and leaving them small victories.

Brian will be the muscle, eager to intimidate folks. Harry will have to provide him with opportunities for his kleptomania to get him in trouble, piles of cash sitting around the mob hideout, just there for the taking. But he'll also want to shine in fights, so beating up mob thugs should be somewhat frequent. Put him in delicate

situations and see if his Anger Issues get him in trouble. If he has to work with Joanna's socialite, that might be a real issue for him.

Joanna's socialite may end up being the real driving force of the group, getting inside information and feeding it to the team. She's got to keep up appearances, so the task force will have to meet somewhere she visits regularly. Maybe the basement of a fancy hotel or club. Lots of potential to play with her emotions and loyalties. What about her husband? What will she do if she discovers he's corrupt? Maybe he's a rising politician. The further he rises the more difficult it is for her. He'll make the husband a city councilman with greater political aspirations.

Finally, Jeff, the cynic, the wise-cracker. He'll be fun for Jeff to play but where does he fit in the web? His general attitude is "nothing to lose" so it may be a good idea to develop something for him to lose. A love interest perhaps? He looked at the Traits Jeff ended up with: Addiction (alcohol) d4; Duty d6, to his friends like the one that was killed; Rotten Luck d8; Smartass d4. For Assets, Jeff selected Sixth Sense d6, his nose for trouble; Reputation d4, as a loyal private eye; Intuitive Leaps d8, because he's a good crime-solver; Hardy Constitution d6.

Harry considers bringing in friends and enemies from Jeff's past as a private detective. He's got a strong tie to the war and anyone he fought beside. The drinking will just be flavor unless Jeff gets captured and has to go through withdrawal. There is room to work with the character. Some things appear once the adventure gets rolling.

In fact, all four characters are pretty inventive and still fit the basic premise. Harry looks up and the players are done with Attributes and Skill selection. Deal with gear and they're ready to take on the mob!

Creating Adventures

The heart of the job of Game Master is creating adventures. You want to challenge the players, transport them to a different world or a different life. You want to give them opportunities to excel and chances to fail. Constructing adventures is as daunting as it first might appear, but hopefully the following advice will be helpful.

Campaign Structure

A Campaign is a series of Adventures that follow a theme or overall plot. Adventures are series of Scenes that relate to a common goal. Ideally the goals of the adventures drive through the plot of the campaign. The three layers; Campaigns, Adventures, and Scenes, give the Game Master easy blocks with which he can build his game.

Plots

If you are going to be running more than a single adventure, consider the campaign first. This includes selection of genre and tone discussed earlier, but then gets specific in terms of what major plots will occur throughout the campaign. Plots can be anywhere from locally serious to epic in scope and should have significant consequences if they are allowed to run to their conclusion unabated. In this way, the actions of the heroes become necessary to derail the plot. Plots do not have to be epic, end-of-the-universe in scope. The campaign could be about deciding whether the villain gets away with murder or not.

The central components of a plot are the Antagonist, his Desire, and the Methods he chooses to achieve them. You must know these things or the plot will prove impossible for the heroes to deal with. True, the Antagonist may change his methods or even his desire in the middle of the campaign, but it should be due to the actions of the heroes. If one method is neutralized but the Antagonist escapes, he will simply try another method. If the heroes have been sufficiently problematic, the Desire may shift to disgracing or even killing the heroes.

The Antagonist does not need to be an individual, although many are. It can be a faceless corporation or an entire kingdom. It simply needs to be intelligent and have a will to reach its Desires. A lack of morals or moral relativism also comes in handy for an Antagonist. It is also possible for the Antagonist to just be a force, a change in the nature of things that causes evil results.

The Desire generally relates to the genre. In a crime drama, the Antagonist may want to get away with murder, steal a fortune, or build an illegal empire. In fantasy, he may wish to defeat the forces of good and impose his own regime on the land. In general, the Desire should be dastardly and onerous, something no law-abiding or good character would accept. There are things that cross the line with even the darkest hero. Note, however, that few villains actually think of themselves as such. They probably are convinced that their ends justify the means.

The Methods are also specific to the genre and the Desire. Just remember that the Antagonist needs to be as smart as your players combined and willing to do things they would not. Manipulations, betrayals, and subterfuge might be the order of the day, the work of a truly slippery Antagonist. Or the enemy might be far more direct, marching an army of monsters across the border to threaten the Fair Kingdom.

It is possible to forgo the grand plot and simply create a theme or long-term goal for the campaign. Perhaps the characters are trying to earn enough money to buy their own ship, or attain command of the King's armies, or penetrate the great mystery of the Foxfire Nebulae. These

are campaign-level character goals that can drive the story as well as a villains plot. This option tends to work best with proactive and inventive players.

Goals

The road to solving the Plot of a Campaign is filled with adventures. Each Adventure should be driven by a specific goal. The goals should lead to one another and solving them fills in the puzzle for the players. In general, a goal should require multiple Challenges to reach, perhaps stretching across more than one gaming session. They should also be fairly clear to the players, something that can help them maintain their focus across the Scenes.

Reaching a Goal is a piece of the puzzle. The player characters should achieve something with each Goal reached: elimination of a threat, uncover a clue or a connection between other clues, acquisition of a new ally or capability, or learn something vital about their enemy. These clues should fit together fairly well so you avoid stumped players and keep the energy in the campaign up.

Challenges

To reach each goal, the characters experience one or more Scenes and face Challenges in them. A Challenge is the smallest building block of an adventure. If the Goal is to discover a secret, perhaps sneaking into a guarded building is required, giving the characters a Challenge. Interrogating a suspect, besting a rival in a duel, or slaying guardian monsters are but a few examples of Challenges. Challenges must fit the genre appropriately and be scaled to fit the player characters capabilities.

Challenges can be relatively easy, showcasing the characters' abilities and letting them shine. They can be more serious, requiring teamwork and good rolls to overcome. And some Challenges will be too much for the heroes. They have to learn to recognize that. Running away and approaching a Challenge differently is an important option in any campaign.

It is important to offer your players a variety of Challenges, so things don't get stale. Make a list of Challenge types that you'd like to see in your campaign and that fit your genre. As the campaign is played out, check it from time to time to see if you're doing one type more than others or if there is an important type you've overlooked.

While it is typical for a Challenge to relate to the current Goal and thus the overall Plot, you can have an unrelated Challenge that deals with one or more characters' motivations and Traits. These help the characters develop over time and can offer a break from the main course of the campaign.

Since all game play comes down to a series of Challenges, any foreshadowing you wish to make for the high-level plot occurs during them. Plot twists and the achievement of Goals occur during or at the end of a Challenge, as well as the introduction of clues and new characters.

A Campaign in Three Acts

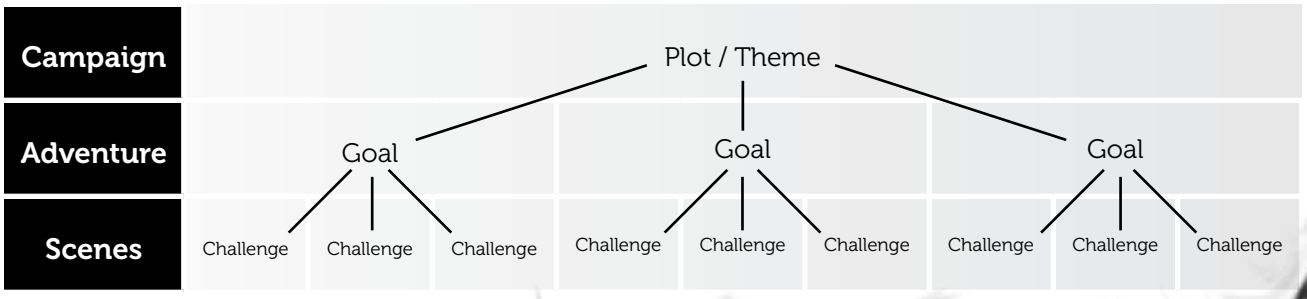
Some may look at the Adventures within a Campaign as "Acts" like traditional story telling. This is an effective way to plan out the broad course of the campaign. A typical "three act" structure works like this.

Act One: The scene is set. We meet the important actors. There is an "inciting incident", and the act ends with a plot twist. The twist generally reveals to the heroes that what they thought was going on, really wasn't right and sends them in a new direction. The end of Act 1 may also be the point where the heroes commit to acting on the problem.

Act Two: This act is the largest and consists of confrontations and rising challenges. The number and severity of the challenges and complications depends on how long you want the campaign to run. Often there is a point in the heart of Act Two where victory seems within grasp, but things fall apart, setting the heroes back. This is a real low point and can cause great stress on the characters and their relationships. Act Two ends with the heroes discovering the real truth and being set on the path to stopping the Plot once and for all.

Act Three: Takes the tension and the action to its height, the climax of the story. The opportunity to confront and defeat the Antagonist appears. One way or another, the conflict is resolved. It follows with a period

Table 7.1: Three Layer Adventure Structure



of Aftermath where life gets back to normal, or the consequences of the villains' victory are displayed.

Creating Momentum & Tension

The key to good storytelling and good role playing games is creating a momentum of interest in the players and tension in the outcome. There must be a realistic chance to fail, but also a shot at success as well. Examining classic "dramatic structure" provides a blueprint for creating tension and excitement in your campaign.

Desire

Every hero must want something from life. Even if it is simply to be left alone, this desire must exist so that the Game Master can place challenges in the path. These conflicts provide the dramatic interest of any story and of any role playing game. Consider the motivations your players have identified during character creation. Those are your easy map to the sort of challenges and adventures they'll really enjoy.

Conflict

Every obstacle and complication that stands in the heroes' way to their desire is a conflict. Conflict is exciting, be it a clash of swords or a duel of wits. Overcoming obstacles and winning conflicts is fun for the players, encouraging them onward in the adventure with confidence.

Rising Action

Just as the Plot of the campaign should be revealed slowly, becoming more and more serious as the campaign moves forward, so should the conflicts the characters experience become more challenging. A minor scuffle outside the Imperial Senate Hall might be fine to start an adventure but soon darker foes appear, determined to stop the heroes. The height of the conflict and the most desperate challenge is the climax of the story.

Resolution

Once the climax is reached, the plot must resolve, either successfully or not. Either way, tension is released and all the forces that gathered during the Rising Action disperse. Surviving villains are either imprisoned or slink away to try again after licking their wounds. Many of the complications that arose during the adventure can be resolved, now that the hero has time to deal with them. Ideally, the players sit back with a great sense of accomplishment as you detail the aftermath of the events.

Pacing

As you consider moving through the stages of an adventure or a campaign, consider how fast you want things to move. One of the big variables here is how often your group will be meeting to play. Weekly play is ideal but often things go longer between sessions. The longer the gaps, the simpler the game will need to be as players will remember less from session to session. If you have a goal of how long you want the campaign to run (6 months, 2 years, etc.) and you know the frequency of your sessions, you can figure out how quickly you need to move through the elements of the plot. To frame the campaign consider reducing or increasing the number of events you have in each goal or the number of goals that need to be completed within your plot.

Pacing is also important to consider during a single session. The average gaming session lasts somewhere between four and six hours. After starting with a couple of Warm-up Scenes, you need to consider what scenes can be covered in the session. The speed of the Cortex System is a big advantage in this regard. Combat scenes can be run quickly, not consuming half your evening with just one fight. As the evening goes on, consider the mixture of contemplation and action your players are going through as well as the chances each has to contribute and influence the course of actions. Being aware of the mood of the table will help you know to speed things up if players are losing focus, or slow them down if they are overwhelmed.

Playing Out Scenes

When starting a scene, it is important to set the stage for the players. Tell them what their characters see and hear. Perhaps give them a chance to pick up something more about the scene through a Skill roll. Identify the supporting characters in the area as well as the mood of the scene.

As Game Master, you replace the characters' senses with your descriptions. The more detailed and flavorful your descriptions, the more interesting the location will become. Be clear on the basics (approximate room size, width of a street, etc.) then introduce nuances such as colors, smells, and sounds. Your goal is to help the players understand the environment as well as their characters would. This enables them to make informed decisions and actions.

Perceiving something hidden in a scene is often critical to the characters' uncovering a clue. Consider that some characters will be more observant than others and more likely to pick up these small details. If someone has been in the place before, add that to your considerations when sensing that something is out of place.

The mood of the scene can be as simple as estimating its state of neglect or cleanliness. If there are supporting characters in the scene, consider their mood and intentions. Are they gathered to have a good time in a bar, or are they fleeing down the street away from some supernatural horror? Are they sympathetic to the characters or hostile to what they think the characters represent?

The second thing to keep in mind in playing a scene is to give the players options. A static scene without opportunities for the players to get involved or affect things will seem difficult to the players. There should be something that draws them into the scene that forces them to make a decision, to act or not to act according to their intentions. These actions should usually advance the goal or the plot or both. Nothing is more frustrating to a player than to have no idea where they should go or what they should do next. Consider making the actions and goals of the adventure fairly clear. They don't have to be spelled out in the beginning, but when one goal is achieved, the next goal should have been made clear.

Act Versus Tell

When speaking for key supporting characters, speak in first person. Even if you don't try to assume an accent, a facial expression and the impact of speaking directly to the players in-character is valuable. It is much more effective than reading a character's words off of a page and it encourages the players to speak in-character as well.

There are many techniques for establishing recognizable characters with your presentation. If you are adept at accents, they are a fine way to personalize a character. Brandishing a signature prop, donning a particular hat, or even adopting a specific body language can help the players "see" the character they are interacting with.

They Are Not Alone

As the characters act and progress through the adventure, keep in mind that there are supporting characters that also have a stake in the scene, the adventure, or the campaign. They will act to either aid or block the player characters' actions according to their own goals and needs. As the Game Master, you are responsible for breathing life into these other actors, making them interesting to interact with and worthy adversaries in the game.

Prior to the gaming session, consider which supporting characters might be encountered and what is most important to them. Judge if any have enough information to act against the player characters either directly or indirectly. Have rumors or news of the player characters actions spread around, winning them friends or hostility? Finally, look at the scenes you expect to run through and see if any of this affects those scenes.

The Warm-up Scene

A good technique for helping players settle into a mood on game night is the use of one or two Warm-up Scenes. One scene lasts up to five minutes of real-time and focuses on one character. It can be a flashback to an earlier time in his life or a minor interaction where they are now. It shouldn't be related to the current plot. Although there may be some tension in the scene, no dice rolling should be involved and the character should never be in mortal danger. If a roll is absolutely necessary, simply assume the character had a moderate success at what he was attempting. The scene should be personalized for the selected character to let them shine. It can be a good way to get a character that doesn't have the spotlight in the regular session often to take center stage. Rotate which character gets the scene from session to session.

While you could run the scene in another room while the other players waited, it is better to just do it at the table with the other players staying quiet. It helps everyone learn about the world and the participating player can simply state if he ever told the other characters about the event.

The Warm-up Scene allows players to explore their character's personality and background in a safe setting. This is especially effective at the start of the campaign when the characters are new. They can learn more about their history and encounter supporting characters for the first time that might come into play later. In the main game of a fantasy campaign, characters might be in a tavern waiting for a meeting. A good Warm-up Scene might have one of them notice another tavern patron in a distinctive robe, one that reminds the character of the time he first encountered people with that robe. This lets you flesh out details about an organization in your world without having them as part of the main plotline or using handouts. The character's experience with them makes them more memorable and relevant. How the character reacts in the scene isn't terribly important, but it gives them the chance to think about how they would react in a future situation like that.

Establishing a tone is more important in some genres than in others. A Warm-up Scene allows the game master to set the mood, by exploring it without the pressure of the current game focus. If your galactic fantasy campaign is supposed to be dark, the Warm-up Scene could have one character witnessing a government crackdown. The

Running a Fantasy Campaign

A fantasy campaign covers a lot of possibilities, from a classic Tolkienesque milieu to a hybrid of fantasy and technology like *Arcady*. It usually involves adventurers seeking fame, fortune, and a rollicking good time. Locations tend to be based largely on Medieval or Early Modern Europe in flavor with doses of the truly fantastic to taste. Characters should be constructed with an understanding of the tone of the campaign: swashbuckling derring-do on the high seas, gritty thievery in a city underworld, questing in the wilds for ancient treasures and knowledge, or serving a king in a war against enemy nations. There are many books and movies that can be used to set the flavor of a campaign, although it is recommended that you select something everyone has read or a movie that players can easily watch before the campaign begins.

The following are some basic concepts to help define the Fantasy genre. When creating your campaign, decide which of these suggestions are valid and which are not. Add ones that are missing to capture the flavor of the campaign you want to run.

Inspiration: *Arcady*, *Lord of the Rings*, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, *The Lies of Locke Lamora*, *Harry Potter*, *Dragonlance*, etc.

Player Character Roles: Savior of an oppressed people, magician, thief, wandering mystic, warrior for hire, seeker of knowledge, raider of ruins, displaced noble, loyal knight.

Motivations: Wealth and Power, Revenge, Glory, Knowledge.

Classic Supporting Characters: Evil wizards, kings, and nobility, foul beasts, wondrous magical creatures, non-human peoples.

Locations: Medieval villages, rich cosmopolitan cities, desolate wastelands, dank dungeons, fairy lands.

Plots: Stop emergent evil threatening the world; prevent kingdoms from falling into war; recover a powerful artifact that will save the kingdom or the world.

Goals: Uncover a mystery; investigate strange activities; explore hidden/forgotten places; negotiate with foreign or magical powers.

Events: Survive an ambush; break into a sealed tomb; meet with the king; convince a group to give aid; navigate a dangerous road

Challenges: Dangerous terrain, wicked monsters, betrayal, rivals, villains, and weaker enemies.

Rewards: Granting of titles, riches in recovered treasure, the admiration of the populace, the favor of other powerful people and organizations, respect, resolution of personal goals.

Running a Crime Drama Campaign

A crime drama campaign usually involves either official agent of law enforcement or private investigators solving crimes. The location and flavor of the crimes sets the tone of the campaign, as does the time period in which the game is run. The focus of the characters should align with the style of the campaign: forensic investigation, FBI serial killer hunters, or violent confrontations. Inspirations are quite numerous in the areas of television and the movies for playing early 20th century detectives through modern techno-detectives and even into the near future.

The following are some basic concepts to help define the crime drama genre. When creating your campaign, decide which of these suggestions are valid and which are not. Add ones that are missing to capture the flavor of the campaign you want to run.

Inspiration: *CSI:, Hill Street Blues*, Phillip Marlowe, *The Shield, Starsky and Hutch*, etc.

Player Character Roles: Police officers, criminologists, detectives, government agents, private investigators, criminal prosecutors, ordinary citizens drawn into the adventure.

Motivations: Justice, revenge against criminals, recognition and respect for fighting crime, devotion to protecting the innocent, bribes, personal glory, revenge against rivals.

Classic Supporting Characters: Higher-ranking commanding officers, assistant District Attorneys, beat cops, criminals, gang leaders, organized crime bosses, innocent civilians, corrupt politicians, dirty cops.

Locations: Headquarters, the street, the hang-outs and hiding places of criminals, night clubs, dark alleys, the warehouse district, rich mansions.

Plots: Root out a criminal overlord, track down a serial killer, fight against ever-present vice, hunt down violent offenders, find the murderer.

Goals: Find and arrest a suspect, discover the connection between the mob and a political figure, get the evidence to link the suspect to the crime.

Events: Car chases, violent confrontations in public places or homes, interrogations, stake-outs, crime scene investigations, meetings with bosses.

Challenges: Dealing with corruption in their own ranks, making the case against a powerful criminal without getting killed or harming loved ones, wrestling with their own pasts and problems.

Rewards: Promotion, citations from the department, picture in the paper, a raise, better funding/equipment, resolution of personal goals.

character has no pressure to act in this case, being out-numbered and alone, but the message of an evil government is delivered strongly. Depending on the progress of the main game, this could be in flashback or occur in the "current" time.

The third use of the technique is to "show off the world." Often players are new to a setting or genre and may not be very familiar with its core themes or devices. In a modern spy setting, a Warm-up Scene can be used to flashback to an early training mission, displaying the kind of technology and influence the Agency can exert in the world. This helps the players understand what they can and cannot rely on their Agency to do for them. In a fantasy world, these scenes can be used to show off the key technologies of the world or the way things work.

A more traditional version of this technique is the cut scene, a short view of the world or other characters actions, outside the knowledge of the current characters. While this can be effective to impart gravity to a situation or enhance mood, it works much better when a current character is embedded in the scene. The scene becomes more relevant and much more memorable. A cut scene of the villain being villainous is fine, but what if the character was there and witnessed the villainy? Suddenly there is a logical reason for that character (and the group) to know the information and it becomes much more present for the players.

When preparing a Warm-Up Scene for a character, take a look at the character's traits and his current focus in the game. Either area is ripe for exploration with this technique. The origin of a particular trait might be explored or explained. Key supporting characters involved with that trait can be introduced in a flavorful way. Places, people, and organizations that the group is starting to encounter in the main game can be presented more leisurely, providing details that the characters should know but which they might not learn otherwise.

Running a Galactic Fantasy Campaign

No universe is larger than the one in a galactic fantasy campaign. From the black and white struggles of *Star Wars* to the silly adventures of the *Stainless Steel Rat* or the more mature milieu of *Star of the Guardians*, galactic fantasy covers the space opera, with humanity spread across the stars. Some campaigns might revolve

Using Music for Mood

With the wide variety of movie soundtracks available, it should be relatively easy to find music to use with your game. Music is a very effective way of setting mood, particularly at the beginning of a session or during key scenes during it. Most of the time, the music should be at a low volume, there but not interfering with anyone's ability to hear or communicate at the table. Keeping it low also helps avoid the incongruity when your "music pak" hits violent battle music in the middle of a calm scene on the tabletop.

For fantasy campaigns, there are some classic soundtracks that can be utilized. The *Conan* movies (composer Basil Poledouris), *Pirates of the Caribbean* (composer Klaus Badelt), *Harry Potter* (composer John Williams), and most any soundtrack from a *Three Musketeers* movie. Be careful in case the soundtrack you're considering is too recognizable. If your players know the Harry Potter theme well but it doesn't fit your gritty fantasy campaign, I'd try something else. Classical music can also be good and there is no end to the supply of it. There are albums of medieval music that would do well for social scenes in taverns and the like, as well as CDs of religious chant that can provide a more pious mood.

Modern campaigns are often driven from an inspiring movie or television show. Using the theme song from that show is a great way to establish the mood at the table. Once you've decided on the mood of the campaign, you can add other soundtracks to your mix. Avoid collections of theme songs as they can become distracting and the mood can be fractured if the themes are from different styles of shows. Even selecting a tone or variety of modern popular music is an option, though again, you want the music to be low and in the background. Some good examples are the James Bond movie themes (early themes for a classic spy feel, later themes for a more 21st century feel), soundtracks to technothrillers like *Mission Impossible*, or war music like the soundtrack to *Black Hawk Down*.

Future campaigns can be trickier but if you find a soundtrack to a movie that has the same sort of mood, it will probably work. Avoid the *Star Wars* soundtracks unless that's the universe you're going to use, as they are too recognizable. *The Alien* soundtracks are good for a horror-flavored dystopian future. *Blade Runner* has a nice retro/future feel to it. *The Matrix* soundtracks are also good possibilities if you accept progressive rock and electronic music as 'in flavor' with the setting.

Professional movie trailer producers draw upon a growing collection of composers who release albums of musical cues—short, minute-long tracks—that can be edited together to give a movie trailer an exciting sound without actually using the soundtrack from the movie being advertised. Composers such as E.S.Posthumus and Corner Stone Cues have produced some very recognizable themes that are only being used in trailers; many of these albums are available commercially online through specialty vendors such as iTunes or Rhapsody.

Finding a good theme song/composition to play at the start of a gaming session, which really defines the mood, is a real asset to the Game Master.

around a military ship like *Star Trek*, while others deal with individuals just making their way through an uncaring universe. There is likely to be faster-than-light travel in some form or another, futuristic weaponry like ray guns, but also retro concepts such as nobility and mysticism. Describe the tone of the campaign to the players before character creation. Will they be serving on a vessel of exploration or war? Will they be secret operatives in a clandestine struggle? Or will they be running in the underworld?

Like most well established genres, there are many examples of books, movies, and television shows that can be used for inspiration or adopted as a setting. The more familiar the setting, the easier it will be for the players to feel comfortable in it.

The following are some basic concepts to help define the Galactic Fantasy genre. When creating your campaign, decide which of these suggestions are valid and which are not. Add ones that are missing to capture the flavor of the campaign you want to run.

Inspirations: *Star Wars, Flash Gordon, Lensman, Dune, Chronicles of Riddick*.

Player Character Roles: Political rebels, soldiers, diplomats, thieves, ship captains, scouts and explorers, adventurers.

Motivations: To explore the universe, fight for a government or to overthrow it, battle aliens or hostile nations, solve mysteries, make a living.

Classic Supporting Characters: Beautiful princesses, evil lords and generals, mad scientists, friendly or hostile alien races, valiant human settlers and explorers, thieves, crime lords.

Locations: Orbiting space stations, deep space, fantastic worlds and structures, ring worlds, starships, moons and asteroids, cities, palaces, military bases, outposts.

Plots: Overthrow the evil empire, save humanity from aliens bent on conquest, explore the galaxy spreading man's dominion, get rich enough to never have to worry again.

Goals: Do a hired job, win a battle, reach a distant planet, discover the traitor, discover the enemy's evil plot, save a hostage, rescue a lost ship.

Events: Engage the enemy in a space battle, meet with powerful people, search a planet from orbit, repair a ship from battle damage, unlock the mystery of an alien artifact.

Challenges: The hazards of space, the crush of politics, dangers of military combat, honor duels, betrayal, wild creatures on alien planets.

Rewards: Riches, titles, ownership of a spaceship, promotion in the military, fame as the solver of a mystery, witnessing glorious sights.

Running the Cortex System

All role playing game systems are designed to help the Game Master and players create stories together. The style of the system and what it emphasizes flavors the games run in it. A very detailed and realistic combat system will favor games where combat is a prime factor in the story and players enjoy spending extra time resolving battles. One that structures characters into distinct classes expects those characters to generally be defined by their class in terms of motivations and personality.

The Cortex System is a quick system that is easy to learn and use. Players that are intimidated by the complexity of other game systems enjoy playing in the Cortex System because they are worried less about the rules and more about the story. The Cortex System is not overly simplistic, but it puts its emphasis on role playing the characters and using straightforward methods to resolve challenges and conflicts.

These rules are fluid, adaptable, and lightweight making them ideal to handle a variety of genres. Here are some aids to help you get the most out of the Cortex System.

Using Traits in the Game

Since Traits play such a strong role in a Cortex System game, it's important for the Game Master to support their use. Make a record of all the player character Traits and keep it on hand. Consider them when preparing for a session and weave in opportunities for those Traits to come into play. During the game, watch for times when your players role play the Traits so you can reward them with Plot Points.

Some Traits describe relationships the character has with supporting characters or events in their background. Bring those to life by having those supporting characters appear from time to time, or something from the past emerge again.

Managing Plot Points

All players enjoy a reward whether it's a chest of gold after a difficult battle or the favor of a princess when her secret requests have been completed. Plot Points are a key reward in the Cortex System. They can be used to reward the role playing of a Complication, a particularly heroic act, or even that perfect joke that knocked the group out of their seats with laughter. Flowing Plot Points contribute to a heroic, cinematic game of fast action and derring-do.

Often the award of a Plot Point is by popular acclaim of the group, but as a Game Master you need to watch for the small moments when a reward is deserved. At its core, a Plot Point rewards behavior you like at your table. This usually equates to wanting people to have fun. So if one player loves to make careful, elaborate plans, reward that player when they make a good one. If someone loves to speak in character and embraces his Complications every session, reward his zeal. If you're just trying to encourage people to make an effort, distribute them to reward that.

You may need to pay special attention to players who are naturally shy or are reticent to declare the actions that you think are worthy of Plot Points. If they aren't being a detriment to the table, watch for ways to reward them too, every once in awhile.

Action Scenes

Nothing kills excitement and momentum more than slowing down to figure out complex action rules. During combat, even pausing to check the exact penalty for cover can lose precious tension. Best thing you can do as a Game Master is study until you know the action rules like the back of your hand. If you can answer questions from memory or from an efficient cheat sheet, your players stay thinking about the challenge in front of them rather than wondering what page the cover table was on again.

One of the strengths of the Cortex System is how it levels the playing field between combat-rule-savvy players and ones who need a simpler system. Now both players can keep things quick and get their actions in without slowing down the scene.

The factor of using Plot Points also gives players a cushion against total disaster. Knowing that one wrong move probably won't mean your death, players can act a little more boldly, take more chances, and really swash their buckle.

Skilled Actions

Simple skilled actions are resolved in a quick die roll, but resist the temptation to let the result go by at the meta-game level. Was the result an utter failure, obvious to everyone around them? Was it a flashy or stunning success? Even a close call deserves some verbal flavoring from the game master.

Complex Skilled actions can be a great source of tension, *if* the clock is ticking. If there is no consequence for taking 10 minutes or 10 hours, then it can easily become just a series of dice rolls, looking to make sure you never botch. Each roll consumes a certain amount of game time. If "bad things will happen" if the action is not successful in a certain amount of time, every roll becomes a source of drama. If that's the case, remember that every roll deserves a play-by-play commentary by the Game Master, bringing the process to life.

Playing the Parts

Populating your campaign will be supporting characters great and small. There will be the faceless masses of cities which require no preparation, villains you will want to detail as deeply as a player character, and everyone in between.

Every genre has **stock characters** who appear to perform a particular service, usually running a business or acting as an agent of the government. Soldiers, bureaucrats, thugs, unimportant nobles, merchants, and more fall into this category. The specific stock characters naturally depend on the genre. A basic set of Attributes, Skills, and Traits work well for any time that type of character is encountered. One of the defining characteristics of a stock character is that he or she is never given a name.

Starship Guard

Agi d8 **Str** d8 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d4 **Wil** d6; **Init** d8+d8 **LP** 12

Skills Athletics d6/Dodge d8, Guns d6/Rifles d10

Gear Tactical Vest (AR 2 W), Plasma Rifle (2d6 W)

Supporting characters that the characters will interact with more often are called **minor characters**. They can be allies, dependents, patrons, and "named" opponents. The villain's lieutenants are minor characters who are defined enough to also have Traits and even some background. They might have favorite equipment or a personal style. Minor characters will almost always have a name, even if it's just their surname.

Kallis Black, Steward of the Overlord's Castle

Agi d10 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d10 **Int** d8 **Wil** d6; **Init** d10+d10 **LP** 14

Traits Anger Issues d6, Brawler d6, Duty (the Overlord) d6, Higher Education d4, Leadership d4, Rank and Privilege d8

Skills Animals d6/Riding d10, Athletics d6, Covert d6/Stealth d8, Discipline d6/Morale d10, Knowledge d6, Melee Weapons d6/Swords d12 + d2, Perception d6, Ranged Weapons d6/Longbow d8, Survival d4

Gear Scythian Longblade (d6 W + d4 S Magic)

The most detailed supporting characters are your lead villains and allies, the most important people to the campaign. They should be fully developed with complete stats, backgrounds, and motivations.

Johnny Slick

Agi d8 **Str** d6 **Vit** d10 **Ale** d10 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8; **Init** d8+d10, **LP** 18, **End** d10+d8, **Res** d10+d10

Traits Allure d6, Contacts d8, Deadly Enemy d6, Greedy d4, On the Run d6, Overconfident d2, Steady Calm d4, Superstitious d6, Wealth d10

Skills Athletics d4, Covert d6/Stealth d10/Streetwise d12 + d4, Discipline d6/Leadership d8, Guns d6/Pistols d10, Influence d6/Intimidation d10/Seduction d12, Mechanic d4, Melee Weapons d6/Knives d8, Perception d6/Gambling d10/Intuition d8, Unarmed Combat d6/Brawling d8

Gear 1944 Colt Commando .357 Revolver (d6 W), switchblade (d2 W)

Description Johnny Slick was born in the gutters of Chicago and they say he stood up and hit the doctor with a right hook. He has stopped fighting since. Fighting to save his skin, fighting to make money, fighting to get power. These days Johnny has other people fight for him. That's because he's one of the biggest crime lords in the Windy City. Owner of greyhound race tracks and master of countless dice dens and clip joints, Johnny is living large now.

In the years before the fancy parties in his Lincoln Park penthouse, Johnny spent time in jail and walked out a felon. He acts like that brand is a badge of honor but it makes him angry. He's determined to never go back and to make sure, he trusts no one.

He made enemies on his way up and sometimes he didn't make sure they were dead before he walked away. Simeon Cook is one such man, scarred across his face from Johnny's knife, Simeon has been growing his old gang. He plans to take away everything Johnny ever achieved. And Johnny knows it.

Where the Rules End

As the Game Master, you have the responsibility for setting the stage for an evening of fun with your friends, and the Cortex System is designed to give you the basic rules to resolve most situations. Still, unusual situations will sometimes crop up. It's in your hands as Game Master to make your best judgment and keep the game moving. It's better to boil things down to appropriate Skills and your best estimate of Difficulty than develop complex rules for every possibility. Given time, you and your players may come up with alternatives to an on-the-spot decision, but for the benefit of the story, it's okay to wing it!

CHAPTER 8
EXAMPLE CAMPAIGNS

So far this book has thrown a ton of ideas at you. The *Cortex System RPG* is a grab-bag of rules and concepts that can be adapted a thousand different ways at the game table. What might help, though, is a look at just how some of this works in practice. What follows are three example settings set in different genres: futuristic space opera, a procedural crime drama, and southern gothic fantasy.

None of these are intended to be comprehensive settings that you can use straight out of the book. Rather, these introduce the major concepts of each setting and show off a handful of unique elements. You can use these as a springboard from which to launch a new campaign, or learn from what we show you in order to build your own setting and stories.

The basic concepts of character creation and action resolution are the bedrock on which to build your story setting. Decide on the kind of genre you're trying to establish, even if it's a strange mixture of modern romance meets Lovecraftian horror. Figure out the tone and mood you wish to convey and start playing with the basic story details that make your world tick. After that you'll have enough groundwork to decide on appropriate Traits, which Skills and their specialties are avaialble, what kind of gear is available to the players and their rivals, and what sort of add-on rules you might need—such as alien tech or powerful psychic abilities.

The three example settings that follow are just the tip of the iceberg. Enjoy, and make them your own.

STAR OF THE GUARDIANS

Based on the novels by Margaret Weis

Star of the Guardians is a far-future galactic fantasy that tells the story of a boy's journey from a protected childhood into the destiny he was bred for—to rule known civilization—like his father before him. It is the story of one man's faith fighting with his own desire for power. Finally, it is the story of how far one woman will go to protect her charge.

The universe of the *Star of the Guardians* novels is one where technology dominates everyday life and certain humans have been bred to be the leaders everyone can look up to. These humans have inherent abilities beyond the powers of technology: powers of the mind that speak across light years, bend the minds of men to their will, and alter matter with a single thought.

As a campaign setting, the *Star of the Guardians* universe is perfect for the Cortex System. Players may play everything from a common mercenary pilot to a member of the Republic's senate to a lost noble of the Blood Royal. The Republic stands, but the lost king has been found. Now, the galaxy is in turmoil. An alien life form that threatens everything that lives and breathes has become a mutual enemy for all factions. Each character in the universe of the *Star of the Guardians* series has a destiny to fulfill and, with enough effort, the means to achieve it.

Summary

The *Star of the Guardians* story is set far in the future after the destruction of Earth, at a time when a corrupt democratic Republic rules over all of known civilization. Now the government is spread through space, encompassing the worlds of humanity and those of many other species. The Republic was established when the former government, a weak but proud monarchy,

was overthrown by revolutionaries. The monarchs were protected by the Guardians, genetically engineered humans who each carried a bloodsword—a special type of energy-sword—but they were unable to stave off revolution.

The *Star of the Guardians* novels give an account of the discovery of Dion, the last monarch's long-lost heir. He is guarded by the few remaining Guardians, now an outlaw group, and hidden away from prying eyes. No one outside of the Guardians knows that Dion exists; even he is kept ignorant of his legacy for his own good. However, there is one former Guardian, Derek Sagan (known as "The Warlord"), working for the established Republic, who knows of him. Sagan begins a search for Dion, killing his former companions and peers to do it.

Eighteen years after the overthrow of the monarchy, Derek Sagan discovers the hiding place of this last king and the Guardians can no longer protect him. After retrieving Lady Maigrey Morianna from her home in exile, Sagan uses her to find Dion. When Dion falls into his hands, the young man is both less and more than Sagan expected.

From there, Lord Sagan and Lady Maigrey become uneasy allies, protecting the boy from his many enemies and from the greatest enemy of all, the Corasians—energy creatures that feed on life. While Maigrey protects her charge as best she can, to the point of selling her soul to do it, Sagan fights the signs of his outlawed God and his own feelings on what to the do with Dion.

Meanwhile, the new president of the Republic, Peter Robes, tries to kill Sagan by throwing him into hopeless battles with the Corasians. Dion, the true king that he is, is not about to just sit back and let his Guardians fight for him. Throughout the story, the increasingly brutal attacks of the Corasians threaten the precarious stability of the universe.

Genre & Concept

The *Star of the Guardians* novels showcase the best of galactic fantasy. Technology is vast. The universe is known but still covets its secrets. The potential of the single person is limitless and "fate" is not just a word. The most ambitious rise to the spotlight, but even the most poor have access to technology and education. Any campaign set in the *Star of the Guardians* universe may spread from a fringe backwater world to a sleek capital city. No futuristic or fantastic location is off limits.

Although technology is so ubiquitous as to be commonplace, religion and the power of the mind are not absent. The Blood Royal Guardians are not the only ones to use psychic abilities. Even on the remote world of Oha-Lau, where Lady Maigrey Morianna hid for almost two decades, that world's primitive people had a shamanic healer with a gift of far sight. And the Guardians are not the only ones to remember the old, outlawed religion; there is an underlying rebellion against the new, and now corrupt, Republic. There is a prevailing sense that change is possible.

An important idea in *Star of the Guardians* are paired notions of power and responsibility. Some people, members of the Blood Royal in particular, are gifted with advantages over others and crave power over others—yet most are compelled to use that power to protect and serve the people they rule. The idea of fate or a divine plan is another large part of this universe. Some may wish to test God or to thwart him, but are they just a small part in the grand design and ultimately serve as instruments of his will?

Tone & Mood

Campaigns set in the *Star of the Guardians* universe should embody the tone of high adventure contrasted with the mood of gritty realism: only after a great fall or a great struggle may a great victory be achieved; nothing is out of reach with enough of the right effort and guidance. Adventures embody the hero's journey from safety to destiny; this journey cannot happen without its ups and downs.

Hope and despair are born within the blackness of space. Ambition and apathy breed within the shining technological walls of a capital city. Destruction and salvation may be found in the oily dimness of an engineer's lab. The *Star of the Guardians* universe is rich in such places and contrasts of emotion, and a campaign may take place on a single planet or it can range across the galaxy.

The people within known civilization are, for the most part, spoiled by their situation and never wish to look beyond it. However, for those few who strive for more, there are the heroes, Guardians, and legends of old to inspire them. This setting is about inspiration, destiny, and for reaching beyond what has been given to you.

Races & Species

Known civilization is home to many races and species of creatures. Most are of human origin, and most of these are not specifically named. The rest of known civilization is very much non-human: some species are empathic or have other psychic abilities; some are very small with shining bright eyes; others have a tough hide, claws, or tentacles.

One of the branches of humanity mentioned by name are the Adonians. They believe in beauty, pleasure, and themselves above all else. It is said that no Adonian has ever committed suicide, mostly because they cannot imagine the world without their presence. What a loss that would be to the universe! Adonia, the home world of the Adonians, is appropriately known for its beauty and for being a pleasure haven.

The vapor-breathers are an example of a non-human species. They are lead by Rykilth, the three-fingered warlord, known for the bubble of vapor surrounding his head that allows him to breathe in normal atmosphere. Rykilth's emotion at any given time is indicated by the color of this vapor. Vapor-breathers are blamed for the disappearance of the entire population on Otos 4. While this was untrue, it triggered the so-called Vapor-Breather Wars.

Beyond the humans and other species of known civilization, the most significant alien race is the Corasians. They are energy beings from a nearby galaxy that periodically terrorized citizens of the old Starfire monarchy's rule. They have also attacked during the time of the new Republic. Corasians glow orange and move by traveling in robotic bodies built for them by slaves. They eat and enslave humans, and think and act as a hive consciousness. Invited into the galaxy as allies by Peter Robes, Abdiel, and Flaim, they have been thwarted by the heroic efforts of the Guardians and the standing space military.

Artificial life is also present in the known universe, self-aware and self-motivated. A good example is XJ-27, an artificial intelligence that "lives" inside the computer system of a Scimitar-class ship. This A.I. is smart, greedy, and controls the ship's functions but can also venture out in a remote unit. He is bitter, sarcastic, and he dislikes his partner's many vices.

Tech & Magic

The *Star of Guardian's* universe neatly blends technology, psychic abilities, and religious magic together without conflicting with one another. In a universe this vast, almost anything is possible. However, the majority of the known civilization is dependant upon technology. Even "dust farmer" worlds have a spaceport and regular shipments on and off planet.

The technology of known civilization is vast. It ranges from machines that help farmers till the land to genetic manipulation; space ships that traverse the blackness to completely automated houses that are voice controlled. This technology is both a boon and a danger for all. The biggest danger is that most machines do exactly as programmed—which could be to make all humans "perfectly happy" which they define as "dead." There is at least one weapon that could theoretically destroy all of creation.

Psionic power is an inherent trait in some species and a bred-in trait for others. This power ranges from mere empathy to the ability to manipulate the mind, or from shape shifting to shaping the physical things around them. It is a rare thing, often looked upon with some fear, but this fear is not unwarranted. There are stories of the horrible things done to innocents by those with abilities beyond their ken. One such cautionary tale is that of the human-impersonator. This is a shape-shifting alien on the planet Laskar that was obsessed with being human, and this desire drove it mad. It would seduce people in its human shape, and then shift back to its natural form after sleeping with them. Its victims would often go mad themselves from the knowledge that they had slept with such a hideous creature.

Blood Royals were genetically engineered for psychic potential. This power was part of their right as the leaders of known civilization. A Blood Royal could make men see what was not there, rip metal doors apart, and in a few cases they could create mind-links with one another. This let them sense each other's emotions, thoughts, and locations, and let them work as one even across the vastness of space.

Religious magic in the *Star of the Guardians* universe could be considered "God given." The Order of Adamant in particular is especially strong, even after the new Republic outlaws it. The initiation rites in which a young Blood Royal is tested stand as an example of religious magic. These draw upon the four elements, represented by a pitcher of water, a bowl of oil, a wand, and a globe. During the rites, the Blood Royal often receive prophecies of the future, but these prophecies do not always come true—or at least, not as interpreted.

Skill & Traits

As always when creating a character for the Cortex System, it's important to know what basic kind of character you want in order to choose the appropriate Skills and Traits for the path you intend to follow. This means the players need some understanding of the *Star of the Guardians* universe. For the most part, the Cortex System Traits and Skills in Chapter Three cover most of the bases of the kinds of character one may wish to play.

One of the Traits specific to this universe is Blood Royal, which includes both full-blooded members and those like Tusk who are half-breed descendants.

Blood Royal (d4/d8)

You carry the genetically engineered potential to be the pinnacle of humanity, a leader among leaders, gifted beyond imagining. Although this brings with it the power to rule over others, the Republic will do anything to keep you from reaching that potential.

d4: You carry enough noble blood to make a difference (quarter- or half-Blood). Though you might try to blend in, you tend to stand out both physically and because of the way people tend to react to you. When dealing with humans not of the Blood Royal, you may add your Trait die to actions concerning persuasion and leadership. Once per game session you may also add your Trait die to any action of your choice, as you channel the power of your blood toward your success. This Trait may also give you access to other Traits not normally available

to human characters, as determined by the Game Master—though never to the degree of one of pure blood. As a drawback, however, your character has an inbred sense of social responsibility and a destiny of which he may or may not be aware: Whenever acting against these things, add the Trait die to the difficulty of an action (or the Game Master may do so without your knowledge).

d8: You carry the full power of royal blood, which makes you stand out among the populace and gives you the potential for power of which most cannot even dream. You gain all the powers and drawbacks as listed above, and have the potential to access truly powerful psionic Traits at the Game Master's discretion. You may also use the Bloodsword and other technology created exclusively for use by the Blood Royal, which would kill anyone else.

Unique Elements

The most unique element in the *Star of the Guardians* series is the genetic manipulation of the Blood Royal families and the resulting technology and consequences therein.

The **Blood Royal** are a genetically bred race of humans. They were created to be brilliant, powerful, and able to mentally manipulate simple elements. They were specifically bred to be the leaders of known civilization. They are the best and based on their looks and bearing, it is almost impossible to hide this genetic breeding.

The **Guardians** are members of the Blood Royal and sworn protectors of the king and his family during the time of the Starfire dynasty. Plucked from their families at an early age, they are trained and tested to shape and hone their skills and powers, making them powerful protectors and deadly adversaries. The Guardians are trained to wield the bloodsword and gifted with the starjewel—a rare gem with a worth measured in planets.

Because of these genetically bred super-humans, technology designed for them and their use advanced in such a manner as to almost be indistinguishable from magic. Special equipment and weapons were created so that only those of the Blood Royal could use them.

The **Bloodsword** is the signature weapon of the Guardians that is activated by inserting five needles into the palm of the user. The needles inject a virus and micromachines into the user that opens the mental pathways of the Blood Royal but will horribly and painfully kill anyone else. It appears as a silver handle but a lightning-blue blade of force-energy emerges from it when active, and has both attack and defensive settings. An attacking Bloodsword is impossibly sharp, slicing its way through nearly anything.

The **Bloodlink** is a communications device that can draw on the power of a Blood Royal—though even someone not of pure-blood is able to make use of it. For example, half-blood Tusk used it to communicate with Sagan at a pivotal point in history.

The **Bloodspear** is a fighter spacecraft created by the Warlord, Derek Sagan, that acts in the same manner as a Bloodsword in that it connects to the pilot's body through the system of five needles and responds with the same precision of a Bloodsword. Maigrey and Sagan used the Bloodspear in a battle against the Corasians.

A **Bloodstone** is a type of stone, also known as heliotrope, that allows those of the Blood Royal to communicate with or spy on each other by having a piece of the stone in the shape of an obsidian in both the location of the speaker and the listener.

Not exactly technology but important nonetheless, the **Starjewel** is an eight-pointed star made from adamant for each of the Guardians. The jewels glow brightly and are of high value. They cannot be taken from a rightful owner and it is said that there is a curse on one who takes a jewel from its dead owner. The light of the Starjewel fades to a hideous blackness when the owner dies or betrays an oath.

Lady Maigrey Morianna

Lady Maigrey Morianna, sister to Platus Morianna, is one of the last living Guardians. She was a hero of the Golden Squadron and a best friend to the Princess Semele before the Revolution. Once mind-linked to Derek Sagan, the two of them were an unstoppable force. However, the mind-link did not reveal everything as Lady Maigrey discovered much too late.

Well-known for her skills as a pilot and swordswoman, she is a beautiful woman with hair the color of sea-foam and sea-gray eyes. A scar runs from her right temple, down her right cheek, to the corner of the mouth, ending on her chin. Though for some the mark is hideous, for others the scar softens her incredible beauty and makes her more desirable.

On the night of the Revolution, she was unable to stop Sagan, her once-trusted partner. When he struck her down, giving her the scar, John Dixter and a few loyal household members saved her. They allowed the medical staff to believe she was already dead, and she barely escaped in a fighter. She crash-landed on a little-known primitive planet named Oha-Lau, where she hid for 17 years.

Lady Maigrey became the beloved leader of the people who sheltered and healed her. Eventually, she was brought back into the conflict when Derek Sagan killed her brother, Platus. Platus Morianna was the Guardian protecting Dion, heir to the Starfire monarchy. When

Platus' death reached her across the lightyears, her dormant mind-link to Derek reawoke, betraying her and giving away her location.

She was then taken prisoner aboard Sagan's ship and forced to help him find Dion. While a prisoner on the ship, she did everything in her power to protect the lost heir. She even committed the unlawful act of wearing her starjewel in public on Sagan's ship, a sin punishable by death.

When pressed, she called for a trial by combat—her right as a Blood Royal—to decide her innocence against Sagan's charge of betraying him during the Revolution. During the duel she had a vision of the Corasians entering the galaxy, bent on destruction. The duel ended in a stalemate as more pressing matters had suddenly come forth.

Unable to keep Derek from finding and capturing Dion, Maigrey swore an oath to protect the heir against all others. Dion won Sagan over; Lady Maigrey and Sagan then initiated Dion into their ranks with some surprising and confusing results. Sagan began questioning his own role in the universe where Dion was concerned. Lady Maigrey forged an uneasy alliance with Sagan once more in order to fight the Corasians and to stop them, the Republic, and the other hidden enemies intent on either using Dion or doing him harm. With the lost king found, Lady Maigrey realized that returning to her duty as Guardian was the only thing she could do.

Bloodsword

A Bloodsword is the signature weapon of the Guardians and of Citizen General Derek Sagan. Each Bloodsword is activated by inserting five needles arranged in the shape of a star into the palm of the user. The needles then inject a specialized virus into the user that is harmless to the Guardians or those of the Royal Blood but it will horribly and painfully kill any other who is injected using a fast-moving, mutating cancer. However, the specialized virus is not just for propriety. It links the sword to the body and when its own power source is drained, it pulls from the only other source available—the body of the Blood Royal wielding it.

The Bloodsword itself consists of a silver handle from which a long blue blade of energy emerges when activated. It is light and easy to handle for those trained in the art of the Bloodsword. The energy blade itself can be turned into an invisible energy shield at the users wish but it takes twice as much power to run the shield. The trick to a duel between Bloodswords is to make your opponent use their shield more than the blade and drain the wielder's strength.

When it comes to wielding the Bloodswords, strength does not count. Agility and Stamina are what will win the fight. "The Bloodsword makes all else equal," as the saying goes. There is no armor that can protect

against the blade of the Bloodsword; it can slice through solid, zero gravity steel as easily as it would cut through flesh. These are prized weapons for those who can use them.

Bloodsword

Dmg d12 W

A bloodsword functions much like a laser sword (see **Chapter Four: Gear**) except ignores all armor and will cause its weapon damage to anything used as a blocking defense (except a defensive shield, such as generated by another Bloodsword)—which means that a character using any defensive action besides dodging will be reduced to Innate Defense only. As a reaction, the Bloodwsword can be switched to create a completely a impenetrable force field around its wielder in an instant, but using the shield inflicts 1 Stun each turn it is active.

Anyone not of the Blood Royal who uses the Bloodsword will suffer terrible consequences as the virus eats it way through the wielder's system—causing d2 Wounds every 10 minutes until his inevitable, painful death.

TRACE

Created by Cam Banks

As the saying goes, there's a thin blue line separating our civilized society from descending into chaos, and it consists of the men and women of law enforcement. Popular television dramas from as far back as Jack Webb's *Dragnet* in the fifties through to the groundbreaking series *Hill Street Blues* in the eighties, *Law & Order* (and its spin-offs) beginning in the nineties, and more recent dramas such as *The Shield* and *The Wire* have all sought to portray this struggle against crime and lawlessness. Similarly, shows like *CSI:, Without A Trace*, and *Criminal Minds* expand the law enforcement operation from off the street to the forensics laboratory and fields such as criminal psychology. This genre has almost limitless inspiration, from television, film, and fiction, to the newspapers that hit the newsstands every day. When the storylines cross from simple criminal investigation to the lives and loves of those who stand shoulder to shoulder against society's miscreants, it becomes the perfect campaign setting for a modern day Cortex System game.

TRACE is set in a fictional city known as Cortez City, in southern California's fictional San Narciso County. Cortez City is approximately two-thirds the size and population of San Diego, positioned north along State Highway 5 where Camp Pendleton USMC military base is located in the real-world California. Like any other US city, it has major problems with gangs, illegal immigration, smuggling, vice, and, of course, homicide and theft. The player characters make up members of TRACE, San Narciso County's Tactical Response Anti-Criminal Enforcement squad, a specialized network of highly trained law enforcement and legal professionals attached to the DA's Office who handle particularly troublesome or involved cases.

The information provided below helps you set the scene and lays out the foundations of a TRACE campaign set in Cortez City. While there isn't sufficient room to exhaustively detail police procedures, forensic investigation, and prosecution, you should be able to at least give the illusion that the player characters live in a world as rich in procedural drama as any television show, movie, or novel. New Traits and uses for Skills appear after the background sections, and a brief guide to the structure of TRACE and scenario ideas attached to the team are provided.

Genre & Concept

TRACE encapsulates the procedural drama genre, which has its roots in mystery fiction during the forties and fifties. Many of the protagonists of mystery novels, movies, and television to this day are also police detectives, which give the reader insight into the means by which law enforcement tackles difficult cases. *TRACE* also delves into the personal lives of these law enforcement representatives, hence the drama element of the genre.

For the purposes of *TRACE*, we're talking about a mixture of mystery and investigation along the lines of detective novels, movies, and television, as well as the more scientific and psychological approach taken by police and federal agents on shows such as *CSI:* and *Law & Order*. A scenario begins with the discovery of a crime and then threads through the investigation, apprehension, and prosecution stages. The TRACE team the players assemble may only handle a subsection of this process, depending on what types of characters the players have chosen, though the nature of these teams is usually such that a cross-section is typical.

Tone & Mood

Cortez City is bright and sunny by day, but dark and lit only by neon and street signs at night. It represents a fictional ideal of the big Californian city, with beaches and wealthy neighborhoods contrasted by inner city slums and ghettos. Much of the drama takes place at night, although the courtroom scenes are inevitably set in the middle of the day when the sun is reflecting off the mirror-like windows of the Cortez City civic center.

The variety of set piece locations for *TRACE* offers a broad selection when it comes to crime scenes. Because the TRACE team is assigned jurisdiction over

all of Cortez City and its suburban areas, a case may surface anywhere. The initial crime scene, reinforced by secondary locations along the investigation path, sets the tone of each scenario. Even the legal stage of the process carries the scenario's tone over to the courtroom; witnesses and evidence serve to link these stages together. Key things to remember when it comes to thematic elements are contrast (rich and poor, night and day, etc) and an almost universal sense that crime will never go away. Like the mythological hydra, when one serpentine head is severed by TRACE, two more will crop up elsewhere.

Nobody said law enforcement was easy ….

Cortez City Locations

The following locations give you an idea of the sorts of places you can stage crime scenes, divert the attention of the TRACE team members, or provide a backdrop for such classic elements as a car chase, drug bust, or shootout. Each location summarizes the key traits of that location, what kinds of characters tend to be found there, and roughly where each area is found. There's no map for Cortez City in this book, as it is intentionally left vague (like any studio set would be), but you should keep in mind that the Pacific Ocean is to the west, the Anza-Borrego Desert is to the east, Los Angeles is 60 miles to the north, and San Diego is about 20 miles to the south.

Amontillado

The Amontillado barrio is divided between a dominant Chicano population and a rising influx of immigrants from the Dominican Republic. This has created a volatile situation for law enforcement, although the vibrant culture and generally welcoming neighborhood has kept it from becoming a war zone. TRACE is frequently assigned to homicides, drug-related crime, and gang violence, but many members of TRACE (and, indeed, the District Attorney himself) were born and raised here. Amontillado doesn't border on the coast, being entirely located inland to the east of the Triple C, which means a lot of the gang-related smuggling and drug crimes common to Amontillado shift toward the stockyards, the Marina, and El Rio Dorado.

Cortez Civic Center

The "Triple C," as locals know it, is the business and political hub of Cortez City. Here the county courthouse, District Attorney's offices, Sheriff's office, and other important locations important to city and county government may be found, looking out over the Pacific Ocean and the San Narciso Marina. Large office building, most of which are loosely inspired by Spanish missions, house the local branches of major West Coast banks, corporations, and foundations. Among these are the head offices of Humentum, a growing technology and metadata services company, and SimpyriMed, a pharmaceuticals corporation that has recently spearheaded a large investment in San Narciso County's business sector. Rumor has it that shady deals and questionable practices are rife at both the corporate and local government levels, although so far nothing has come to light.

El Rio Dorado

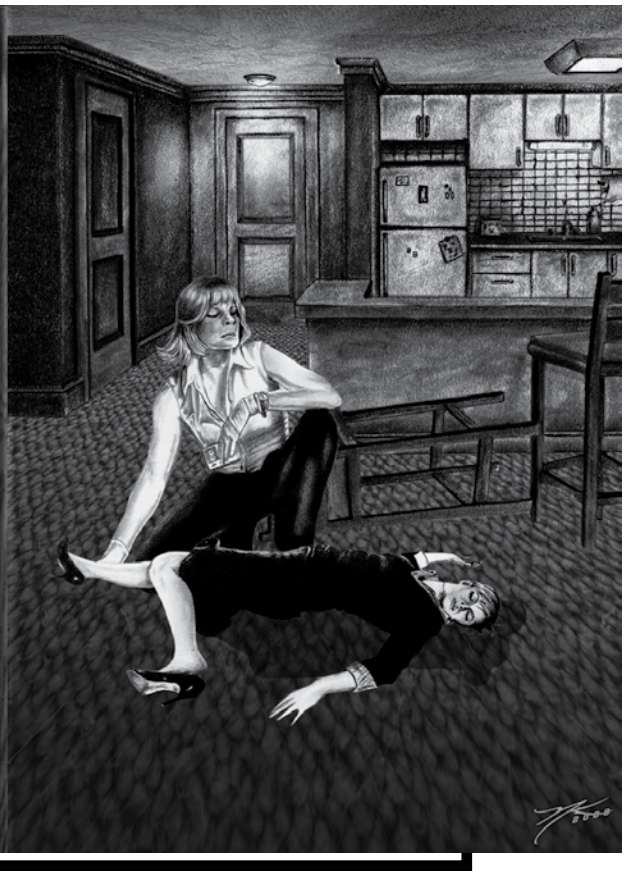
This is a long stretch of commercial and residential properties, characterized by the rich and famous. It extends northward away from the Triple C, and includes extensive beachfront property, private wharfs, and ritzy nightclubs. El Rio Dorado is also the location of the powerful law firm of White, Argylle, Yeoman, Custer, & Standish, who represent a number of millionaire clients, celebrities, corporate board members, and the like. Crime along El Rio Dorado leans heavily toward the thriving drug trade that can usually be traced back to Amontillado but which continues to be a major problem. Show business and ad firms target El Rio Dorado heavily, also, which bring many other associated vices along with them.

Norton Estates

The Norton Estates is one of several outlying suburban areas, populated mostly by middle-class professionals and their families. It has an excellent school system, a pair of shopping malls, movieplexes, and several park areas. In recent years, the growing suburban drug problem has brought more attention to the area, especially when it involves teenagers or stay-at-home parents, and TRACE has also had to respond to domestic abuse cases, schoolyard shootings (three in the past 10 years) and robbery. The crime rate has dropped in the last year overall in the Estates, primarily because of the renewed focus of the San Narciso Sheriff's Department on suburban law enforcement, but all it takes is one laid-off employee, disgruntled teen rebel, or botched car theft to trigger a series of nasty events.

Ridgetop

Ridgetop was earmarked for industrial and commercial zoning in the last decade, which involved reclaiming acres of desert land and extending the size of Cortez City northeastward. It was an essential move on the part of the city planning commission but it has brought its own series of problems. So far, TRACE has responded to organized crime, gang-related crime, and even industrial espionage in the Ridgetop area, and the District Attorney has also begun to work with federal agencies to police some of the worst of these. SimpyriMed, the pharmaceutical company that has its offices in the Triple C, maintains three large processing plants in Ridgetop, and owns more land here than any



other commercial landowner. This creates friction between the CEO of SimpyriMed and the Mayor, who has been very public about his concern that Ridgetop remain competitive in the business world.

San Narciso Marina

Although the Marina is open to anybody who wishes to pay the money to keep their yacht or fishing boat moored year-round, it enjoys considerable short-term business from summer tourists and wealthy visitors. This has given it a ritzy reputation that it largely doesn't deserve, since any affluent yacht owner will tend to patronize one of the private clubs further up the coast. TRACE teams have been called out to the Marina and its adjacent beaches on many occasions to settle violent disputes, nighttime smuggling operations, and even a marauding shark. It turns out the shark had six kilos of heroin in its stomach, so that particular case took a sharp left turn. Needless to say, TRACE teams usually have at least one or two members available to them who know how to pilot a ship or use SCUBA equipment.

TRACE Team Organization

The Tactical Response Anti-Criminal Enforcement squad of the San Narciso County District Attorney's office is comprised of specialists from multiple branches of standard law enforcement and criminal prosecution. Its organization is something of a cross section of these other groups, given the resources needed to resolve a case from the moment they are brought into the crime scene to the jury's verdict. Because this campaign assumes the player characters will take up one or more crucial roles in Cortez City's TRACE team, none of these positions have been assigned to supporting characters. The basic archetypes for each specialist on the team are laid out below, together with additional information about TRACE resources.

Crime Scene

Crime Scene Specialists are trained in forensics investigation and process. Most have a background in chemistry or biology, or their related fields. Typically, the Crime Scene Specialist's role comes ahead of everybody else, but on a TRACE team he continues to be involved even during the prosecution, providing additional case evidence and analysis. TRACE Crime Scene Specialists are always armed and given basic firearms training because many of the scenes they are required to be at are dangerous.

Detective

Detective Specialists are graduates of a police academy and usually enlisted straight from a Detective HQ from San Narciso County, San Diego County, or one of the LAPD bureaus. A TRACE Detective's role is carrying the case from the crime scene to the courtroom,

investigating leads, questioning witnesses, and canvassing the area for more information. Most TRACE teams have at least three Detective Specialists, one of whom is the senior detective responsible for reporting directly to the TRACE squad headquarters. Usually, the senior Detective Specialist is also the TRACE team leader, and he must be familiar with all of the other elements of the team as well as his own. Like the Crime Scene Specialist and Weapons Specialist, the Detective Specialist carries a firearm at all times.

Legal

A TRACE team's senior Legal Specialists are qualified lawyers, hired from State or Local law offices. Because TRACE works directly under the District Attorney, he usually assigns one of these Assistant District Attorneys to oversee the Legal Specialists. The ADA hires the rest of the Legal Specialists and manages the trial process, liasing between TRACE and the DA's Office. Junior Legal Specialists sometimes accompany the Detective Specialists when canvassing the area, meeting with suspects, and vetting witnesses. Many of them are paralegals, and TRACE is providing them with the on-the-job experience they need to complete law school. Legal Specialists are not armed, but owning a gun license is recommended.

Medical

Medical Specialists are trained in autopsy procedures and in processing medical evidence. Like most medical examiners, a TRACE Medical Specialist is a registered professional and has usually passed through medical school for accreditation. Like the Tech Specialist, the Medical Specialist is usually unarmed. He will accompany one or more Detective Specialists, work with the Tech and Crime Scene Specialists, and then serve as an expert witness during trial. Occasionally, a Medical Specialist serves double duty as a Crime Scene Specialist or even a Psych Specialist, but the majority of TRACE's Medical Specialists have plenty to do without broadening their workload.

Psych

Psych Specialists in a TRACE team are called upon to provide expert witness and analysis in cases involving mental illness, serial killers, abnormal psychology, and behavioral psychology. However, they are often called in at the beginning of the case, together with the Crime Scene Specialist, when the mental well being of victims, law enforcement, or emergency services personnel is a priority. Every TRACE team is assigned at least one senior Psych Specialist who has the authority to hire junior specialists and from time to time act as the team leader.

Tech

TRACE employs a number of Tech Specialists, each of whom focuses on a specific area. These can include cybercrime, security systems, communications, vehicles, and data analysis. A Tech Specialist must be capable of stepping in and dealing with any of these or with other specialties, so they represent some of the most proficient technology experts in the field. Tech Specialists are not armed, although they may individually carry a firearms license. For the most part a Tech Specialist does not go into the field until the crime scene or suspicious location is cleared by TRACE and declared a safe zone. From time to time, though, a TRACE team will show up at an active crime scene and stumble into a conflict without meaning to. Thus, TRACE encourages its technical experts to be physically fit.

Weapons

The sheer scale of cases that TRACE teams are assigned to means that demand for Weapons Specialists is high. Each team has one, if not two or more individuals trained in munitions, high-powered weapons, ballistic evidence processing, and armament. A Weapons Specialist is on hand in the course of investigation, once Detectives isolate key hotspots or scenes in which armed assistance is needed. Some Weapons Specialist pull double duty as Crime Scene Specialists, although their expertise is mostly confined to determining trajectory of bullets, identifying shell cases, and so forth. TRACE conducts extensive background checks on every Weapon Specialist hired to the squad—over and above the normal profile—due to the high stress of their role. It's a common saying among other specialists that the Weapons Specialist is always the quiet one.

Equipment and Gear

Many of the high-tech gadgets and equipment from **Chapter Four** are ideal for a *TRACE* campaign. Because the team members are part of a professional law enforcement organization attached to local government, they do not have to purchase their equipment themselves and instead are outfitted with the best gear available to them for their role on the team. From time to time, it may be interesting to enforce cost-cutting measures to reflect a change in the city government's own financial state, or to have the player characters seek state or federal support. This shouldn't happen all the time, however; it's no good being part of one of the West Coast's premier law enforcement teams if you don't have the equipment you need to get the job done.

Team Headquarters

TRACE central headquarters ("The Triangle") is located in the Cortez Civic Center, or Triple-C, just down the street from the County Courthouse and across an

intersection from CCPD's central depot. TRACE also maintains offices in other areas of the city and in outlying communities, as well as safehouses, vehicle depots, and storage. Each TRACE team is usually assigned a suite of offices either in the central headquarters or in one of the district buildings. For the purposes of an ongoing *TRACE* campaign, the players should be given the option, but being headquartered in the Triple-C is probably the most ideal.

Skills & Traits

Characters in a *TRACE* campaign have a broad selection of Skills and Traits, keyed to their role in the TRACE team. Most have some training in Covert, Guns, and Perception, for instance. Where things start to become clear is when you add Specialties to the equation. Two TRACE officers may have Perception d6, but where one has the Deduction Specialty, the other may have Investigation, or Empathy, or Search. Refer to **Chapter Three** for extensive descriptions of Assets, Complications, and both General and Specialty Skills.

A Note on Rank and Privilege

The Rank and Privilege Asset is broad and relatively undefined in **Chapter Three** because it is inevitably specific to the campaign you're in. In *TRACE*, all members of the TRACE team get a d2 level in Rank and Privilege (or, simply, Rank) for free. This affords them the equivalent rank in other law enforcement communities of a sergeant. When dealing with civilians who respect your position (whether good or bad), you gain a +2 Skill step to Influence actions, and have access to the appropriate resources. For an additional 2 Trait points, you can buy this up to d4, which is the equivalent of a lieutenant. This gives you additional influence over police, detective, city council, and other organizations. This is also the minimum required level for a TRACE team leader. A rare few TRACE teams may have a Rank d6 leader (equivalent to the rank of captain) which is more than likely a department head working directly for the DA, and probably outside the scope of a typical *TRACE* campaign.

Skills and Traits by Team Role

The kind of specialist you decide to play when you create a *TRACE* character will inform most of your decisions. What follows is a short (and hardly exhaustive) list of suggested General Skills, Specialty Skills, and Traits. Skills are listed as General Skill/Specialty/Specialty/etc., though you do not need to take every Specialty Skill suggested.

Crime Scene: *Skills*—Animals/Zoology/Entomology, Artistry/Forgery/Photography, Covert/Forgery, Guns/Pistol, Knowledge/Appraisal/Law, Mechanic/Automobile Repair, Medicine/Forensics, Perception/Search, Science/Environmental Sciences/Life Sciences/Math/Physical Sciences; *Traits*—Contacts, Photographic Memory

Detective: *Skills*—Athletics/Climbing/Dodge/Jumping/Running, Covert/Stealth/Streetwise, Discipline/Intimidation/Morale, Drive/Car, Guns/Pistol/Rifle, Influence/Administration/Bureaucacy/Conversation/Interrogation, Knowledge/Culture/Law, Medicine/First Aid, Perception/Deduction/Empathy/Investigation/Search, Unarmed Combat/Brawling/Wrestling; *Traits*—Brawler, Contacts, Fast on your Feet, Hardy Constitution, Intuitive Leaps, Talented, Tough

Legal: *Skills*—Discipline/Interrogation/Intimidation, Influence/Bureaucracy/Conversation/Interrogation/Intimidation/ Persuasion/Politics, Knowledge/History/Law/Philosophy/Politics, Perception/Empathy/Intuition/Sight; *Traits*—Contacts, Formidable Presence, Intuitive Leaps, Steady Calm

Medical: *Skills*—Animals/Animal Care/Veterinary Medicine, Discipline/Concentration/Resistance, Knowledge/Law, Medicine/All Specialties, Perception/Deduction/Search/Sight, Science/Life Sciences, Tech/Medical Equipment; *Traits*—Hardy Constitution, Steady Calm

Psych: *Skills*—Animals/Animal Training, Discipline/Interrogation/Morale, Influence/Conversation/Interrogation/Persuasion, Knowledge/Law/Philosophy/Religion, Medicine/Pharmaceuticals/Psychiatry/Rehabilitation, Perception/Empathy/Hearing/Intuition/ Read Lips/Sight; *Traits*—Faith, Good-Natured, Intuitive Leaps

Tech: *Skills*—Covert/Forgery/Safecracking, Discipline/Concentration, Guns/Repair, Knowledge/Law, Mechanic/All Specialties, Perception/Sight, Science/Physical Sciences, Tech/All Specialties; *Traits*—Attuned to Technology, Quick Learner, Talented, Uncommon Knowledge

Weapons: *Skills*—Athletics/Dodge, Covert/Camouflage/Stealth, Discipline/Resistance, Guns/All Specialties, Heavy Weapons/All Specialties, Influence/Intimidation, Knowledge/Law, Melee Weapons/All Specialities, Perception/Hearing/Sight/Tactics, Ranged Weapons/Grenades/Repair/Thrown Knives, Survival/Tracking, Unarmed Combat/Judo/Brawling; *Traits*—Lightning Reflexes, Two-Handed Fighting

Campaign & Adventure Ideas

The *TRACE* campaign offers a number of avenues into the modern law enforcement drama, depending on what you and your players are interested in. While the typical *TRACE* campaign takes a single case from the beginning to the end, this may require a fair bit of preparation (just watch a season of *The Wire* for how involved this can get). Here are a few suggestions for how to use this material and get a campaign started.

Campaign Models

Season Story Style: In this model, which is the default, there's only one TRACE team in San Narciso County, and you are it. Each story arc covers a single major case, usually violent crime with secondary crimes associated with it, from the point at which TRACE are called in to the point at which the Legal Specialist signs off on the court documents. The bulk of the fun in this model is the investigation angle, the interplay between the various specialists, and the inevitable twists and turns that turn what may seem like an open and shut case into an extended and dramatic struggle against seemingly impossible odds.

Episodic Story Style: In this model, the players take on a smaller part of the larger TRACE team, with the other team members being run by the Game Master as supporting characters. The focus is usually on the crime scene investigation, the detective's inquiry, or the SWAT-like operations contained within a larger framework of cases. Each episode may take as little as one session to as many as four or five to complete, but there should be a definite impression that there's more going on in the background.

Troupe Ensemble Style: Troupe-style play means the players create two or more characters, making up the whole team, and switch out which one they're playing depending on the session (or even multiple characters per session.) This campaign is ideal for a smaller group who wants to follow a single case or group of cases along the Season Story model but don't want to necessarily stick with a single character. It's also good for Episodic Stories, especially when the Game Master is a revolving position as well (letting him play a character now and then) or for when there are non-TRACE characters in the campaign. In the latter case, a good rule of thumb is to have each player create a TRACE team member and a civilian character, thus opening up interesting stories set in Cortez City and San Narciso County that may at times only tangentially involve the TRACE squad.

Suggested Media

The following lists cover a fairly broad range of stories, most of which involve procedural drama in some way. Television is your best bet, since *TRACE* is directly inspired by shows such as *CSI:* and *The Shield*, but the movies and crime authors listed here are wonderful for inspiration. Look to these books, TV shows, and movies to get a feeling for how characters interact with each other, how the criminal mind works, and how certain aspects of law enforcement can be sidetracked by human error and mistakes of judgment. All of it is excellent reference material, and entertaining if nothing else.

Television

Cold Case
CSI: (and spin offs)
Criminal Minds
Law & Order (and spin offs)
NCIS
Without a Trace
The Shield
The Wire

Movies

Assault on Precinct 13
Heat
The Kingdom
LA Confidential
Narc
Sixteen Blocks
SWAT
Training Day

Crime Fiction (authors)

Tony Hillerman
Ed McBain
Kathy Reichs
Lawrence Sanders
Joseph Wambaugh

Arcady

Based on the novels by Michael Williams

Arcady is a southern gothic fantasy that tells the story of Solomon Hawken, a failed seminarian, who returns to his ancestral home to find it slipping through the borderland between reality and dream. Hawken's struggle to save his bizarre and fractured extended family plays out upon a thematic landscape that warns of the dangers of progress and the impact of the written word upon society. Its sequel, *Allamanda*, continues to reveal more and more about the mysterious Absences and the nature of the world itself.

The world of *Arcady* offers a glimpse at a different sort of fantasy, one in which muskets and gunpowder are commonplace, and magic is tied up in powerful forces that may be invoked by reciting sacred texts and manipulating the tattered edges of reality. Unlike a typical sword and sorcery setting, *Arcady* has no elves and dwarves, no dark lords or magic items of legend. It cleaves more to the fantasy literature of Neil Gaimain, Charles deLint, and the timeless works of William Blake, than it does toward Tolkien or Robert Jordan.

As a campaign setting, *Arcady* is ideally suited to the Cortex System. Players have the choice of playing soldiers and officers in the Citizen's Army or partisans of the Rebellion; they may take up the study of the Text at the great schools in the north, or dabble in dangerous arts revealed in the parting of the veil at the Borders. Each character in the world of *Arcady* has something to struggle for, an ideal to pursue, or at the very least a skeleton in the family closet.

Lands of Arcady

The world of *Arcady*, the world of the Presences, is divided into four countries: Urizen, in the south, where most of the action in the novels takes place; Tharmas, in the west, a backwater province; Urthona to the north, location of the university of Lambeth; and Luvah, to the east, seat of power of the ruling Citizen Arouet. The great Alph River flows westward from the mountains of Luvah to the plains of Tharmas, and serves as the boundary between Urizen and Urthona. Small towns, farmsteads, and the occasional fort dot the countryside, often many leagues from the nearest settlement.

The countryside is swept up in a civil war. Citizen Arouet, backed by the regular army, is the authority. Resistance has arisen against his ambitious rule, however, and green-frocked Partisans have conducted guerilla warfare and enacted raids upon the Citizen's Guard for years. It is not uncommon to see groups of soldiers, led by officers on horseback, marching along the roads that crisscross the landscape. Some take up short-term residence in abandoned manors, or are invited to stay on the grounds of palatial estates.

Flowing over the Presences, manifesting in remote areas or at the edge of settlements, are the Borders. Strange things emerge from clouds of half-light and stretches of reality-bending darkness. Pockets of surreal dream and nightmare claim young children and spit them back out as Blights. Sometimes, the Borders withdraw and reveal an Absence, where reality surrenders to dream completely. Even more than war, the struggle against the encroaching Borders gives the countryside a sense of pervasive dread. Bordermetal,

the twisted and sharp remnants of an age long ago out of sight and memory, is a prized commodity in Citizen Arouet's regime. Even stranger things have been found at the places where dream and reality touch; fey circles, perhaps, or standing stones where none once stood.

Genre & Concept

The world of *Arcady* embraces many of the tropes of the southern gothic novel, although it broadens the often subtle or subdued supernatural and magical aspects of that genre into a full-blown fantasy setting. Sprawling old estates, much like the antebellum plantations of the American South, and large families with many terrible or safeguarded secrets, are just two examples. A campaign set in *Arcady's* world should seek to include these in some shape or form. Even though Solomon Hawken, the protagonist of *Arcady*, has spent years away from his ancestral home and his family, he must return to them and protect them from the troubles that have arisen in his absence. It is this notion that one's heritage is key to one's identity that gives support to the unfolding drama.

The Borders, literally the edge of reality, introduce the wondrous and often dangerous aspects of the setting as metaphor transitions into manifestation. The Text, sacred writings recovered from pre-recorded eras, also embody literal power, although they, too, are dangerous in their obscurity: though their power is literal, its results are often completely unexpected. Fantastical creatures, distortions of reality, and prophetic visions are further tools with which to bring the mundane questions that beset the protagonists into a stark light.

Tone & Mood

Adventures in the world of *Arcady* should seek to capture the contrasting elements of dreamlike revelation with gritty reality. Often, a character must strive to reconcile these opposing forces, or help a family member do the same. Some people in the world of *Arcady* never see anything quite so monstrous or fantastic as the protagonists of the novels, but word carries from community to community. The same could be said of warfare; Arouet's conflict with the rebel Partisans affects everyone in the Presences, but not everybody actually confronts an armed soldier.

Outside of the Absences and away from the encroaching Borders, Solomon Hawken's world is very much like that of Colonial America, or that at the turn of the 19th Century—men with tricorner hats and greatcoats, cavalry officers with flintlock pistols, familial estates and indentured servants. The uprising against Citizen Arouet and his calls for progress, his new machines and technology, has left many widows and orphans. There is no magical healing potion to be

purchased from a corner store, and some of the most prominent characters are middle aged or older, coping with oppressive mortality.

Within the Borders, however, people are gifted with surprising vivacity; constructs of dream and desire reflect the shining hopes of those who bear witness to them or the abiding fear of those trying to escape. In these places set apart from reality, the tone and mood of the world enters the extremes of light and dark. Emotions, running themes, and metaphor manifest to the characters, often in direct or dangerous ways. Being trapped in an Absence or lost to the Borders is a persistent fear of the scholarly and the superstitious.

Cultures & Backgrounds

The prevailing culture in the world of *Arcady* is agricultural in nature; plantations and farms make up the greater percentage of settled land. Each estate is owned by a family and passed down through the generations, and the laborers or servants who work on the estate are usually tied to the land as well. A child of an affluent family may grow up alongside children of crop workers, forming relationships that later prove essential in the proper maintenance of the land. Education is typically the right of the well-to-do, with children being sent away to school or, in some cases, other branches of the family to study.

In larger towns, especially those in areas favorable to Citizen Arouet, progress is championed, education is more scientific and technological, and society appears more industrialized. The wealthy in these parts of the Presences are more likely to own businesses than manage property in the country. Growing up in these towns and cities affords a greater opportunity to learn a trade or a profession. A handful of headstrong or ambitious members of rural families travel each year to the marbled cities of the East, in Luvah, to make a fresh start and a new fortune. Too many of them find that their fortunes have turned, and like many of the poor they are forced to find laborious work under Citizen Arouet. Some even become miners of bordermetal, their lives wasted.

For both men and women in the Presences, a career of military service entails a culture all of its own. After years of internecine strife, mostly as a result of provincial resistance to Citizen Arouet's government, most families have seen sons and daughters sign up with the Army or join the green-coated irregulars. The Citizen's Army, headquartered in Luvah, enjoys better training and resources, but officers and soldiers in the Army must occasionally wrestle with their decision to side with Arouet. It is not uncommon for disaffected soldiers to defect to the side of the Partisans, or even for a family to have soldiers on both sides as the Hawkens do. Regardless of which faction a soldier or officer belongs to, however, it is almost impossible to leave it behind once he returns home. Once a soldier, always a soldier, for good or ill.

For the purposes of a campaign set in *Arcady's* world, player characters may stem from the rich or the poor, the industrious or the backward. As the Citizen's Guard and the revolutionary Partisans alike draw their soldiers and officers from all walks of life, and even scholars hail from any number of backgrounds, the choice is ultimately a dramatic tool. It's a good idea to pair up those of a lower station with those of a higher one, if social classes are different. This disparity of social status shouldn't affect the outcome of a story, but it may suggest many avenues of role playing.

Tech & Magic

Arcady is a setting where magic and technology do not necessarily conflict with each other; rather, the ambitions behind those that use them drive conflict. The use of the Text by Solomon Hawken to create magical effects, or the mining of bordermetal to produce Arouet's engines and mills, tells us more about those men than it does about the tools they use. Indeed, Solomon and his brother Endymion are not strangers to optics, physics, and other uses of machinery. It is the purpose behind them that seems to matter.

Technology

Arcady's level of technology is most like that of the Industrial Revolution in Earth's history, although it is clear that in the time of Old Eden, which is how the Presences' scholars refer to the distant past, technology was significantly more advanced. Steam-powered cycles (velocipedes), hot air balloons, flintlock muskets and rifles, sawmills and sewing machines, and the printing press are all available. Bordermetal is prized because it is a remnant of Old Eden, tempered and superior to any metal mined in the mountains of Luvah or northern Urizen. Left behind by the Border ruffles as they pass over field and forest, bordermetal appears as twisted wire, tumbled girders, and the remains of artifacts unfathomable to most people. Arouet's engineers either use it as-is or melt it down in furnaces, repurposing the metal for his ongoing efforts to quell the irregulars and rebels.

Magic

In contrast to technology, magic is ephemeral and largely out of reach of the commonfolk of the Presences. Superstition and folklore, of course, tell them that it is everywhere: in the touch of a fey spirit, the ruffles of the Borders, and the words of the priests and scholars of the Text. Much of this is true, but harnessing and making use of magic requires dedication and study,

motivation, and belief most of all. Angelic beings, such as the phoenix-like Khole who attended Solomon Hawken in *Arcady*, have occasion to share this knowledge with a handful of aspirants. For the most part, however, the seminary at Lambeth fosters a newer way of thinking, of natural philosophy and science as an explanation for the phenomena witnessed at the Borders. The Text doesn't serve as a magical tool as it once did for mages decades prior to Solomon Hawken's return to Arcady, perhaps because belief and understanding has waned.

For those that still grasp the truths of magic in the world of *Arcady*, it can be a tool of tremendous utility. Foremost in the magus' skills is scholarship—the study and lifelong commitment of the Text and its Commentaries and Hymns to memory—for therein lies the basis for casting spells. Next is a creative and interpretative mind. The Text is not like a set of instructions. It is metaphor, prophecy, and poetry, which leave it up to the magus to determine which passage or verse to use in an incantation. Lastly, the magus must be in tune with the magic around him, which is far more likely at the Borders or within an Absence. Spells rarely function in the mundane landscape of the Presences without some bond or connection to the surreal dreamscapes of the Borders. Once all of this has been achieved, the magus finds that while he may desire an effect, the magic itself will often determine how this effect will manifest. At times, magic doesn't seem to have worked, when in fact something truly magnificent has occurred somewhere outside of the magus' perception. Fine control and literal transference of thought into magical reality is thus not the aim. Will, and surrender to the magic's understanding of what is needed, is the key.

Rules for Using Magic

Magic-using characters in an Arcady campaign should be relatively rare, and possess the Scholar of the Text Asset. This setting uses a version of the Skill-based Ritual Magic system described in **Chapter Seven: Window Dressing**. Appropriate tools include a copy of the Text, its Commentaries, or the Hymns; lenses, mirrors, or globes of crystal; artifacts from Old Eden (which are essentially 20th or 21st Century technological devices); and anything else that the Game Master approves of as a focus. At the core, however, is the Spellcraft Skill, the Scholar of the Text Trait, and a casting Threshold determined by the Game Master.

Like standard Ritual Magic, all actions are Complex Actions and can take a number of turns to complete. Casting spells also generates Strain. Unlike the standard, the effect is usually left entirely up to the Game Master to determine, using the intent of the spell (as described by the player) to alter or change the world in some way. Players should be encouraged to spend Plot Points for story manipulation, also, as this is an ideal occasion to use them! Botches should also be used as occasions for the Game Master to make life more interesting for the magus, not just as another excuse to add Stun damage.

Skills & Traits

Creating characters in a campaign set in the Presences requires a little advanced knowledge of the setting, but for the most part the core Cortex Traits and Skills cover most of the bases. The following section looks into how to use these aspects of character generation in the world of *Arcady*, including some setting-specific Traits that may help frame your character more appropriately.

Most of the General Skills listed in **Chapter Three: Traits and Skills** are appropriate for an *Arcady* campaign. The exception is Tech, which has no analogue, and Drive, which is renamed Ride. *Arcady* has no automotive carriages, although it does have the occasional steam-powered bicycle, for which Ride is still the appropriate Skill. Pilot will not see use very often, but it is the default Skill for use in piloting airships, hot air balloons, and dirigibles.

The Text falls under Knowledge/Religion and Knowledge/Literature, depending on the application or scope of the question. Using the Text (or the Hymns and Commentaries) to work magic uses the Spellcraft Skill, available only to those who have the Scholar of the Text Asset.

The following new Traits are available at the permission of your Game Master.

Scholar of the Text (d2-d8)

You've studied the Text, the Hymns, and the Commentaries. You can reference the stories of Saint Milton and the Bard, and grasp at least on some level the underlying meaning. You can usually come up with a reference, a passage, or a section of verse to suit almost any occasion, which is at times a comfort to those who are discouraged or lost. Depending on the die rating you have in this Asset, your knowledge of the Text affords you a number of benefits.

d2+: At this level, you can recite inspirational or affirming passages from the Text or the Hymns, helpful in times of stress. Add the Trait die to any Influence Skill action you make to improve morale, inspire courage, or convince someone of the rightness of an action.

d4+: At this level, you may use your knowledge of the Text to work magic through incantations and invocations. You may purchase a rating in the Spellcraft General Skill, though you can't purchase Specialty Skills unless your Trait die is d8+.

d6+: You are among only a handful of respected authorities on the Text. If your Scholar of the Text Trait die is d6 or more, you gain a bonus to Plot Point

expenditures on actions that include this Trait. If you spend any Plot Points on these actions, count the total spent as if it were 2 points higher; spending 1 point nets you a d6 bonus die, 3 would net you a d10, and so on. This Trait only benefits Plot Points spent before the roll, not those spent after.

Border-Touched (d4/d8)

You've spent too long in the grip of the Borders, or perhaps you were taken as a youth and became one of the Blights. You might even be the child of a mortal man and a dryad or undine from some Border-ruffled forest or lake. However the dream worlds have affected you, they have left you changed. This is a mixed blessing; even though you have a measure of tolerance against the preternatural powers that lie beyond the Presences, it keeps you from ever being completely a part of polite society.

d4: At this level, the influences of the Borders are minor, but noticeable. Choose one Attribute to which this Trait adds its value to as a bonus on any action based on that Attribute. You have some visible and identifiable physical characteristic or quirk as a result of this enhancement (such as abnormal muscles, an enlarged cranium, oddly elastic joints, and so on). When you are within the Borders or an Absence, you may add this Trait to any action made to resist magic or forces conjured forth against you. In any social interaction with normal people (i.e. anybody not connected to the Borders) this Trait die is added to the Difficulty of any actions you take to positively influence or impress somebody.

d8: This level encompasses all of the qualities of the d4 level, but you no longer look fully human. For the most part, you choose to live within the realm of the Borders, rather than the Presences; you cannot go longer than 24 hours in the real world before losing coherence. For every six hours or part thereof that you spend away from the Borders or an Absence, you suffer a –1 Attribute step. If any one of your Attributes is reduced below d2 by this penalty, you become unconscious until taken back to the Borders. As soon as three Attributes are reduced below d2, you die. Your spirit eventually finds its way back to the Borders, where it remains ever after as a remnant of your former self.

Both levels of Border-Touched may earn you Plot Points if you role play the unsettling and unnatural aspects of the Trait. With the Game Master's permission, you may even buy off this Trait with advancement points, or find some other way—perhaps a ritual buried in the contents of the Text—to stave off or eliminate the Trait.

Campaign & Adventure Ideas

With the background material in this rulebook, the Cortex System rules, and Michael Williams' *Arcady* and *Allamanda*, you have everything you need to get started with a campaign. Or do you? One of the key questions might be, "Where do I start? What exactly do the player characters do?" The following list includes suggestions for adventures and plotlines to get the wheels on your velocipede turning.

Campaign Concepts

- The player characters are all members of the same extended family, much like the Hawkens in the Arcady novels. They can be the children of a single matriarch or patriarch, cousins in a family with multiple (and perhaps conflicted) branches, or even the servants and hired hands of an aristocratic family.
- The player characters are all enlisted soldiers, officers, and engineers attached to the Citizen's Guard or the rebel Partisans.
- The player characters are students, staff, or professors at a seminary or university such as Lambeth. Several may be scholars of the Text, although this isn't necessary. Those that are may disagree on the interpretation, falling into one of the four major religious factions: Orthodox, Post-Millenial, Olneyan, and Leech-Gatherer. Or, they may all be united against Citizen Arouet's ambitious tyranny.
- The player characters are all Blights, young zealots of the Text transformed by the Borders, waiting for the return of Saint Milton. This would be a very different campaign, more fantastical and heavy on symbolism.

Adventure Hooks

- The player characters discover an artifact left over from Old Eden, in the time before the Veil; or, alternately, somebody opposed to them finds one. The artifact could be anything, although it should be presented in somewhat vague and unfamiliar terms. Unearthed by the passing of Borders, perhaps creatures or denizens seek to liberate it from the player characters.

- A young man who has escaped the Blights appeals to the player characters for aid. He may be related to them, the son of a prominent citizen in Luvah, or a hapless youth from a farmstead nearby. The ferocious Blights pursue the boy, bringing them into conflict with the player characters.
- The player characters witness a murder, rape, robbery, or other crime, and pursue the perpetrator. Passing into the Borders, they are swept up in a violent, surreal, or metaphorical war within the mind of the criminal. Surviving the dreamscape may even allow the player characters to bring redemption to the criminal, or justice for the victim.
- Citizen Arouet declares a new program of urban development, coinciding with the player characters' arrival in a town or village that the Citizen has targeted for the program. Resistance or interference from the Partisans seems inevitable. The program may be entirely innocent, or entirely oppressive.
- A new version of the Text is being circulated. Is it like Solomon Hawken's manuscript from *Allamanda*, and part of a new future? Or is it a heretical and dangerous tome, whose use threatens to tear reality from its foundations?

Suggested Reading

Michael Williams, *Arcady* and *Allamanda*.

William Blake, *Complete Illuminated Books*, Thames & Hudson, 2001

William Blake, *Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*, Anchor, 1997

CHAPTER 9
ALLIES AND ADVERSARIES

Describing the scenery is certainly important in a role playing game, but the inhabitants of your imaginary world truly bring it to life. Whether they are benign critters, dangerous villains, shifty townsfolk, or terrifying monsters, they give the player characters someone (or something) to pit their skills against. The examples in this chapter are just the tip of the iceberg for what you might find in any given setting. The Game Master is encouraged to mimic, modify, and make up new people and varmits for his own use.

Animals

Boar

Agi d4 **Str** d10 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d6 **Int** d4 **Wil** d10; **Init** d4 + d6; **LP** 18

Traits Inherent Armor d2, Tough d4

Skills Perception d4, Unarmed Combat d6/Bite d8/Tusk d8

Description Boars are extremely aggressive and ignore penalties due to excessive damage. The boar's **tusks** (d2 W) can cause grievous injuries and are even worse with a **charge** (d4 W). The **bite** (d4 B) is secondary but still dangerous.

Brown Bear (Grizzly)

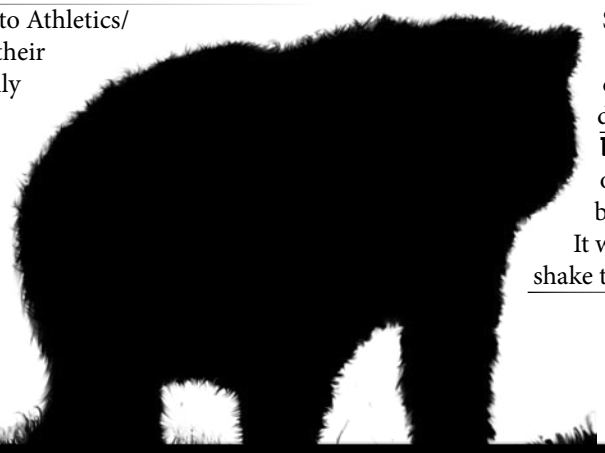
Agi d4 **Str** d12 + d4 **Vit** d12 + d4 **Ale** d6 **Int** d4 **Wil** d8; **Init** d4 + d6; **LP** 24

Traits Inherent Armor d4, Enhanced Senses (Smell) d6

Skills Athletics d6/Climbing d10/Sprinting d10/Swim d8, Perception d4, Survival d6/Mountains d8/Forest d10, Unarmed Combat d6/Bite d8/Claws d10

Description Bears have immense muscles in their shoulders, giving them tremendous power. A **claw** (d10 B) from a grizzly can snap the spines of even large animals, such as a bison, and its **bite** (d10 B) can tear a deer open. Bears are deceptively fast and well known for their physical stamina.

Bears gain a +2 step to Athletics/Climbing actions due to their claws. If a bear successfully grapples a target, it can immediately deal its Strength die as Stun damage.



Camel

Agi d4 **Str** d10 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d6 **Int** d2 **Wil** d6; **Init** d4 + d6; **LP** 14

Traits Anger Issues d2

Skills Athletics d6/Running d8, Perception d4, Survival d12, Unarmed Combat d6/Bite d8/Spit d10

Description Camels have been used as mounts for thousands of years in desert conditions where the camel's ability to conserve water makes it more useful than a horse. Unfortunately, the camel also has something of an attitude and has been known to actually spit on people. Its **spit** attack, while not deadly or even painful, can be quite disgusting (Average) Resistance action or suffer a –2 step to all Attributes until the end of your next turn due to a wave of nausea). The camel's **bite** is d4 B.

Crocodile

Agi d4 **Str** d10 **Vit** d12 **Ale** d6 **Int** d4 **Wil** d8; **Init** d4 + d6; **LP** 20

Traits Inherent Armor d4

Skills Athletic d6/Sprint d10/Swim d10, Covert d6/Ambush d10, Perception d4, Survival d6/Tropics d10, Unarmed Combat d6/Bite d8

Description Crocodiles tend to inhabit slow-moving tropical rivers and lakes. Larger species, such as the Nile crocodile, are especially dangerous to humans. Crocodiles are ambush hunters, waiting for fish or land animals to come close and attacking with a rush of power and speed.

Crocodiles attack with a **bite** (d8 B), and due to its powerful jaws a crocodile's Strength gains a +2 step for purposes of grappling, but suffers a –3 step for trying to open its mouth when it's being held closed.

Dog

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d4 **Wil** d6; **Init** d8 + d8; **LP** 14

Traits Duty d6, Enhanced Senses d6 (Hearing, Smell)

Skills Athletics d6/Run d8, Influence d4, Perception d4, Unarmed Combat d6/Bite d8

Description This set of stats represents one of the larger domesticated dog breeds. A dog attacks with a **bite** (d4 B). It will often seek to grapple and start to shake their opponent.

Elephant

Agi d4 **Str** d12 + d8 **Vit** d12 + d4 **Ale** d4 **Int** d4 **Wil** d10; **Init** d4 + d4; **LP** 34

Traits Impaired Senses (Sight) d4, Inherent Armor d6, Tough d4

Skills Discipline d6, Perception d4, Unarmed Combat d6/Tusks d12

Description Elephants have been used in war since before the time of Alexander the Great. Elephants use their incredible mass to run down opponents and **trample** (d10 W) them. Elephants may also attack with their **tusks** (d12 B).

Gorilla

Agi d8 **Str** d12 + d2 **Vit** d10 **Ale** d6 **Int** d12 **Wil** d8; **Init** d8 + d6; **LP** 18

Traits Natural Athlete d4, Formidable Presence d4

Skills Athletics d6/Sprinting d8/Jumping d10/Climbing d12 + d4, Covert d4, Influence d6/Intimidation d8, Melee Combat d4, Perception d6, Survival d6/Highland or Lowland d10, Unarmed Combat d6/Pummeling d10

Description Gorillas are found in the tropics and subtropics of Africa. They are the largest of the primates. The gorilla engages in a **pummeling** (d4 B) attack, though if they pounce on a victim as part of a jump the damage die increases by +2 step.

Great Cat

Agi d8 **Str** d8 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d6 **Int** d6 **Wil** d8; **Init** d8 + d6; **LP** 14

Traits Enhanced Sense (Sight, Night-Vision, Hearing) d8, Formidable Presence d4

Skills Athletic d6/Balance d10/Climbing d8/Dodge d8/Jump d10, Covert d6/Stealth d8, Perception d4, Survival d6, Unarmed Combat d6/Bite d8/Claws d10

Description Great cats include lions, tigers, cougars, and jaguars—carnivores that may range from a few feet in length to as many as 10 or 11 feet and can weigh as much as 700 pounds. They attack with **claws** (d4 W) and a **bite** (d6 W).

Great White Shark

Agi d6 **Str** d12 **Vit** d10 **Ale** d6 **Int** d2 **Wil** d10; **Init** d6 + d6; **LP** 20

Traits Formidable Presence d8, Infamy d6, Inherent Armor d4

Skills Athletic d6/Swimming d12, Covert d6/Ambush d8, Perception d6/Movement d12/Tracking d12, Survival d6, Unarmed Combat d6/Bite d10

Description The great white shark is an immense ocean-dwelling critter that can reach a length of 20 feet; the largest great whites caught were in excess of 37 feet in length. Sharks are highly sensitive to movement in the water and have the ability to smell and track blood for miles. Sharks attack with a **bite** (d8 W).

Horse

Agi d6 **Str** d12 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d6 **Int** d4 **Wil** d8; **Init** d6 + d6; **LP** 22

Traits Enhanced Senses (Sight) d4, Tough d4

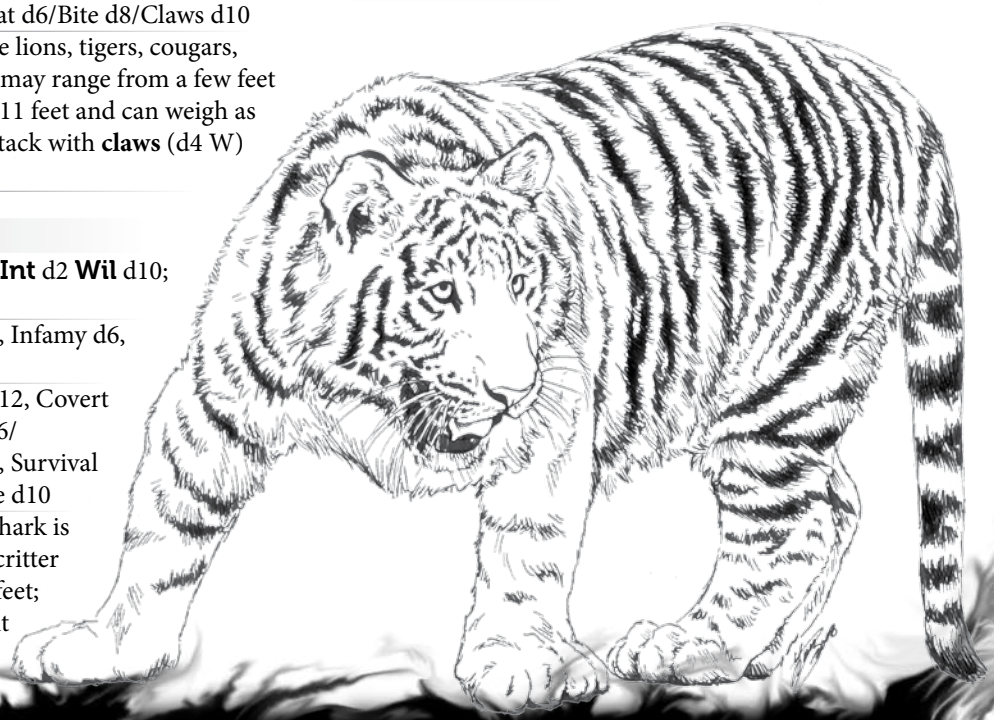
Skills Athletics d6/Running d12, Perception d8, Survival d4, Unarmed Combat d6/Kick d8

Description Horses have a **bite** (d4 B). The double-kick (d10 B) requires the victim to make a Formidable Strength + Strength roll or be knocked prone. The front **hooves** (d6 B) are slightly less dangerous. Horses are also known to **stampede** or **trample** (d8 B).

From Mundane to Movie Monster

Any basic creature or animal in this section can be dressed up with additional Traits, enhanced Skills, or a tweak of Attributes. One simple way to turn a standard critter into a beast worthy of the heroes' attention is to crank it up to Large scale. The burrowing fiend, dinosaur, dragon, and lake monster are all Large scale monsters, because they're supposed to be titanic in size. However, nothing stops you from turning an elephant, raptor, or gorilla into a massive leviathan by doing the same.

Your players will be thrilled. Or crushed. Perhaps both!



Insect Swarm

Agi d8 **Str** n/a **Vit** d2 **Ale** d2 **Int** n/a, **Wil** d2; **Init** d8 + d2; **LP** 8

Skills Athletics d6, Unarmed Combat d6/Sting d8

Description These statistics may be used for any swarm of potentially dangerous insects—bees, wasps, even ants. The swarm moves at a base speed of 10 feet. Normal weapons are useless on an insect swarm; only area-effect weapons such as gas, chemicals, or flame can harm them. The swarm disperses after taking a combination of 8 Stun and Wound damage.

Anyone caught in a swarm may be attacked with **stinging** (Agility + Unarmed Combat/Sting, d4 S). This attack can't be dodged or blocked. The attack only causes Stun damage, but in some cases swarms employ a poison that is Easy to resist. Every additional turn of successful damage from a swarm increases the poison's Difficulty by +4. If a target's Resistance action against the poison comes up as an extraordinary success, the poison has no effect. If the action is a success, the target takes d4 B damage from the poison. A failed Resistance action increases that to d8 B; botches increase it to d12 B.

Raptor (Bird of Prey)

Agi d6 **Str** d4 **Vit** d4 **Ale** d4 **Int** d4 **Wil** d4; **Init** d6 + d4; **LP** 8

Traits Enhanced Senses (Sight) d8

Skills Athletics d6/Flying d12, Covert d8, Perception d6/Sight d10, Survival d6, Unarmed Combat d6/Claws d8/Beak d8

Description A raptor is a bird that dives down on a target, using its beak and talons to capture and kill. These birds of prey include eagles, kites, falcons, hawks or harriers, owls, and condors. Raptors usually attack with surprise. They sit or glide over an area beforre striking with **claws** (d4 B) and **beak** (d2 B)

Monsters

Alien, Grey

Agi d4 **Str** d4 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d10 **Wil** d10; **Init** d4 + d8; **LP** 8

Traits Attuned to Technology d6, Eerie Presence d6, Fragile d2, Enhanced Communication (Telepathy) d6, Infamy d6, Uncommon Knowledge d8

Skills Covert d6/Abduction d12/Stealth d8, Discipline d6, Guns d6/Energy Weapon d10, Knowledge d6/Humanity d8, Mechanic d6, Performance d6/Slow Dance d8, Spaceship Repair d8, Perception d6, Pilot d6/Spaceship d10, Science d6/Life Science d8/Dissect & Probing d12, Tech d6

Description Greys are also sometimes known as Roswell aliens, after a famous incident that took place in 1947. Greys typically stand up to four feet in height and have a grey-toned skin color from which they get their name. They are skinny and their joints are abnormal compared to humans, which makes their movements appear awkward. Their head is usually described as overly large, and their hands typically have three to four elongated fingers.

Greys will often have advanced equipment such as **energy pistol** (d8 W, see Ranged Weapons in **Chapter 4: Gear**) or sci-tech scanners and flying saucers.

Burrowing Fiend

Agi d2 **Str** d10 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d4 **Int** d4 **Wil** d8; **Init** d2 + d4; **LP** 16

Scale Large

Traits Ambidextrous d8, Enhanced Movement (Burrowing) d6, Enhanced Senses (Tremorsense) d6

Skills Perception d6/Tremorsense d12, Unarmed Combat d6/Mandibles d10/Tentacles d8

Description The burrowing fiend is a massive, bus-sized critter that burrows through the earth. It has a large set of three or four mandibles and a number of tentacles that can reach as far as 10 feet out of its mouth. The **mandibles** inflict d2 Basic damage on the Large scale (which translates to d2 x 10 Personal scale damage), while the **tentacle attacks** (d4 B) operate on the Personal scale. The tentacles can grapple, pulling a target toward the fiend's maw.

A fiend can attack up to 4 times a turn (without any multi-action penalties) using any of its 12 different tentacles. An individual tentacle can be destroyed and has 8 Life Points. A called shot against a tentacle is +4 to the normal Difficulty.

The fiend can burrow through earth, but cannot go through stone without continued effort that the fiend is generally not interested in pursuing.

Carnivorous Plant

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d4 **Int** d4 **Wil** d6; **Init** d6 + d4; **LP** 14

Traits Enhanced Manipulation (tentacles) d10, Enhanced Senses (blindsense) d8, Inherent Weapons (thorny spines) d4, Quick Learner d4

Skills Ranged Weapons d6, Survival d6, Unarmed Combat d6/Tentacles d10

Description This man-eating creature resembles a Venus flytrap of prodigious size. It has a central core, usually with a gaping mouth or something resembling one, and a multitude of flailing **tentacles** (d4 B) and tendrils with which it drags in its prey. This version can hurl **thorny spines** (d2 W) at its victims, also, injecting them with a paralyzing nerve agent—Average Difficulty to resist, victim cannot move for d4 turns.

Some carnivorous plants have the ability to speak or spray gas or spores into the area. Others can get up and move around, walking through the jungle or an urban

neighborhood, searching for tasty food. The carnivorous plant's blindsense lets it know when something is nearby and attack as if it had vision, and its Quick Learner Asset represents its ability to adapt to new situations rapidly. The latter can be dropped if it's intended to be a big, dumb vegebrute.

Demon

Agi d6 **Str** d12 **Vit** d12 **Ale** d8 **Int** d6 **Wil** d8; **Init** d6 + d8; **LP** 20

Traits Allergy (Religious/Blessed Items) d8, Anger Issues d4, Eerie Presence d6, Fast Healer d6, Forked Tongue d6, Formidable Presence d6, Immune (Fire and Heat) d8, Inherent Weapons (Claws) d4, Longevity d4, Pyro d10, Tough d6

Skills Athletics d4, Covert d6/Stealth d8, Influence d6/Intimidation d10/Seduction d10, Knowledge d6/Hell d10/Occult d10, Melee Weapons d6/Sword d10, Perception d4, Performance d6/Acting d8, Unarmed Combat d6/Claws d10

Description This creature from the Pit is over eight feet tall, red-skinned, horned, and clawed. Despite this fearsome appearance, the demon is capable of remarkable levels of seductive talent, talking people into all manner of deals and trying to barter for souls. When confronted by agents of Good, the demon will roar its displeasure and try to tear them apart with its **claws** (d4 W) or a **huge sword** (d8 W).

Dinosaur, Allosaurus

Agi d4 **Str** d12 **Vit** d12 **Ale** d4 **Int** d4 **Wil** d4; **Init** d4 + d4; **LP** 18

Scale Large

Traits Focused Hunter (Herbivores) d6, Inherent Armor d4, Inherent Weapons (Claws, Bite) d4, Tough d4

Skills Athletics d4, Perception d6, Unarmed Combat d6/Bite d8/Claws d8

Description The allosaurus is a very large carnosaur, one of the meat-eating therapods of the late Triassic and early Cretaceous periods. While not as huge and infamous as the tyrannosaurus rex, the allosaurus is still a dangerous beast. It uses its **claws** (d4 W, Large scale) and **bite** (d4 W, Large scale) to bring ruin and savagery to the herbivores in its native era.

You may use these statistics for any large bipedal dinosaur, or you may modify it for fantasy campaigns to represent non-magical dragons. You could drop its scale to Personal and use it for smaller—yet still dangerous—reptilian threats, also.

Dragon

Agi d6 **Str** d12 + d4 **Vit** d12 **Ale** d8 **Int** d6 **Wil** d8; **Init** d6 + d8; **LP** 22

Scale Large

Traits Combat Ready d10, Danger Sense d4, Enhanced Movement (Flight) d12, Enhanced Senses (Blindsense) d8, Formidable Presence d6, Glory Hound d4, Greedy d8, Hardy Constitution d6, Immune (Fire and Heat) d8, Inherent Weapons (Claws, Bite) d4, Inherent Armor d2, Lazy d4, Out for Blood d8, Overconfident d4, Pyro d10, Rival (Dragonslayers) d4, Tough d4, Unbreakable Will d4, Wealthy d4

Skills Athletics d6/Contortion d10/Dodge d8, Covert d2, Discipline d4, Influence d6, Knowledge d6, Perception d6/Blindsense d10/Hearing d8/Sight d10, Performance d6/Oratory d8, Unarmed Combat d6/Bite d8/Claws d10

Description Dragons are iconic to fantasy worlds and heraldry. Dragons are smart, but greedy, and have many personality flaws. Four limbs, each ending with savage **claws** (d2 W, Large scale), large bat-like wings, **scales** as hard as iron (Armor Rating 4W), a head like a cross between a lion, alligator, and horse, and jaws filled with razor-sharp **teeth** (d4 W, Large scale). Once every four turns it may **breathe fire** in a stream up to 60 feet (d8 W fire damage, and may set obects, creatures, or characters on fire).

Dragons are awe-inspiring creatures capable of widespread damage and disaster. Some sages believe they're a force of nature, others a curse. The Game Master may switch the classic flame breath weapon for something else, such streams of acid, the ability to conjure up storms and lightning, or being surrounded by clouds of thick poisonous gas. Dragons should be unique and frightening. Scale down these statistics to Personal level if you want them to be a little less lethal.

Giant Spider

Agi d8 **Str** d12 + d4 **Vit** d10 **Ale** d8 **Int** d4 **Wil** d10; **Init** d8 + d8; **LP** 20

Traits Coward d4, Enhanced Senses (sight) d6

Skills Athletics d6/Wall Crawling d12, Covert d6/Stealth d10, Perception d6/Sight d8, Unarmed Combat d6/Bite d8

Description The giant spider is a true arachnophobic's nightmare. These spiders have six-foot bodies with 15 to 20-foot long legs. Giant spiders have **fangs** (d6 B), and if the target takes Wound damage, poison is delivered. The poison is resisted with a Formidable Resistance action. Failure means the victim is paralyzed for 1d6 hours, though this usually doesn't matter as such targets are usually encased in webs and devoured.

For an even bigger spider that one might see in a giant-monster movie, increase this creature to Large scale.

Formless Horror

Agi d8 **Str** d12 **Vit** d4 **Ale** d6 **Int** d4 **Wil** d12; **Init** d8 + d6; **LP** 24

Skills Perception d6/Tracking d10, Survival d6, Unarmed Combat d6/Grapple d10/Squeeze d12

Unique Form This creature has an unstable nature. Attacks that are not designed to deal with its special nature are less effective. The Formless Horror is completely immune to Stun damage and functions as if it possesses 4W armor. It can slip through crevices and other tight spaces, such as under a doorway. It is possible a Formless Horror that is split by an attack could form into two or more smaller creatures.

Description This game information can apply to anything from an amorphous blob monster or mist creature to an entity made of pure energy. The key factor is that it has no true anatomy to speak of and can usually take all kinds of forms and shapes.

Formless Horrors can have several means of attack. They could cause acid damage (d2 to d12 W, depending), or could simply suffocate a target. Game Masters are encouraged to find a unique way for the characters to affect the creature: firebombs, electrical fields, vacuum environment, cold storage lockers, etc.

Gryphon

Agi d8 **Str** d12 + d2 **Vit** d10 **Ale** d6 **Int** d4 **Wil** d8; **Init** d8 + d6; **LP** 18

Traits Enhanced Senses (Lowlight Vision, Sight) d6

Skills Athletics d6/Dodge d8/Flying d12, Covert d6/Dive-Ambush d10, Perception d6/Sight d10, Survival d6, Unarmed Combat d6/Bite d8/Claws d12

Description Gryphons have the body of a lion and the wings, talons, and head of an eagle. Gryphons have a wingspan of 25 to 30 feet and swoop down on their prey, much like eagles. Many noble and powerful people admire them, using the beast in their coat of arms, but only the canniest riders can acquire a defiant gryphon as a mount. Young gryphons are often sought after; they are far easier to tame and train.

Gryphons attack either by raking with their **talons** (d4 B) or with their powerful **beaks** (d4 W). If the gryphon can pounce on a target, flying down upon it from above, it gains two rake attacks as one action.

Harpy

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d4, **Wil** d6; **Init** d6 + d8; **LP** 14

Traits Out for Blood d4

Skills Athletics d6/Dodge d8/Flight d8, Covert d6, Influence d6, Melee Combat d6, Perception d6/Tracking d8, Performance d6/Singing d10, Ranged Combat d6/Archery d10, Survival d6, Unarmed Combat d6/Claws d8

Description Early stories of harpies reveal them to be winged death-spirits, but in later tales harpies are beautiful women with wings and talons for feet. Harpies are found in the stories of Jason and the Argonauts and in almost all circumstances they are depicted as cruel, violent and extremely vicious.

Harpies have the ability to disarm their victims with their song. Any non-harpy within earshot of the harp must make a Willpower + Willpower test against the Willpower + Performance/Singing action of the harpy. Once a harpy's song is resisted, it will have no further effect for 24 hours. If the target failed the opposed action, he is compelled to make his way toward the harpy no matter what dangers present themselves. The harpy attacks the helpless victim with its **claws** (d4 B). Harpies will occasionally use manufactured weapons, such as **bows** (d4 W, see **Chapter 4: Gear**).

Lake Monster

Agi d6 **Str** d12 **Vit** d10 **Ale** d6 **Int** d4 **Wil** d4; **Init** d6 + d6; **LP** 18

Scale Large

Traits Coward d6, Enhanced Movement (Swimming) d2, Enhanced Senses (Sonar) d6, Hideout d6, Impaired Movement (Clumsy on land) d6, Inherent Weapons (Bite) d4, Klutz d4, Shy d6, Tough d8

Skills Athletics d6/Swim d12, Covert d6/Stealth d8, Perception d6, Survival d6/Aquatic d10, Unarmed Combat d6/Bite d8

Description These statistics cover beasts such as the Loch Ness Monster in Scotland and the Ogopogo in North America. They are the shy, reclusive but much talked about descendants of the plesiosaurus, swimming about in cold and misty lakes. They are found as babies by children and "adopted." A lake monster can **bite** (d4 W, Large scale) but isn't

aggressive. Smaller versions, such as an adoptee, won't be Large scale and thus they're less likely to cause damage to a child's room or a family bathroom.

A modified version of the lake monster can be used for a sea serpent, although you'll want to eliminate the Coward and Shy Traits and add Anger Issues. Such a creature can coil around a ship, crushing it, so it may be smart to add the Constrict Specialty Skill at d8.

Zombie

Agi d4 **Str** d10 **Vit** d10 **Ale** d2 **Int** d2 **Wil** d8; **Init** d4 + d2; **LP** 20

Traits Brawler d6, Simple Needs (Undead/Eat Brains) d8, Slow Mover (10 feet/turn) d2, Ugly d4

Skills Perception d4, Unarmed Combat d6/Bite d10/Grapple d10

Description Zombies are walking corpses that seek to feast upon the brains of others. There are many different movies or television shows that feature zombies of one type or another. Zombies do not need to breathe or drink and do not sleep or rest, so they can be a terrible foe to have to deal with. Zombies move slowly, but tirelessly—they usually never run or sprint—unless the Game Master decides that his setting has fast zombies.

Zombies are immune to Stun damage, thus the best way to deal with one is to deliver as much Wound damage as possible.

If someone is bitten by a zombie he might catch the infection and eventually transform into a zombie himself. Anyone bitten by a zombie might get infected, and within 24 hours become a zombie themselves. If damaged by a zombie's **bite** (d2 B), a victim makes an Average Resistance action, adding a number of points to the Difficulty equal to half the total Wound damage delivered by the bite. The speed at which the transformation takes effect is up to the Game Master and the specific campaign, but a Plot Point or two might be spent by a player to hold off the transformation long enough to make it more dramatic.

Ordinary People

Athlete

Agi d8 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d6 **Int** d6 **Wil** d6; **Init** d8 + d6; **LP** 14

Traits Glory Hound d2, Natural Athlete d2

Skills Athletics d6/(pick one) d8, Discipline d4, Influence d4, Medicine d4, Science d2

Description Whether track and field, golf, tennis, or soccer, the athlete makes his living in competitive sports. With slight changes, the statistics can represent someone whose star is rising or who faces the long, slow path downward. A burned out athlete may have Addiction or Hooked, while a young amateur switches out Glory Hound for Idealist.

Average Joe

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d6 **Int** d6 **Wil** d6; **Init** d6 + d6; **LP** 12

Skills Four at d6, two at d4

Description What else is there to say about the innocent bystander, the faceless commoner, or the regular who hangs out in the bar? Not a lot, but the Average Joe can go from a minor supporting character to being a critical part of the story when he is shot, arrested, angered, seduced, thrown into a plot of intrigue and danger, swept up in a cosmic saga, or many other unnatural or exotic events. Or, as with most of his type, he joins the throng and is never seen again.

Beat Cop

Agi d8 **Str** d8 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d6 **Int** d6, **Wil** d6; **Init** d8 + d6; **LP** 14

Traits Brawler d2, Duty (Police) d10, Prejudice d4, Tough d4

Skills Athletics d6/Dodge d8/Running d8, Covert d6, Discipline d6/Intimidate d8, Drive d6/Automobiles d8, Guns d6/Handguns d10/Shotguns d8, Influence d6/Persuasion d8, Knowledge d6/Law d8/Neighborhood d10, Medicine d4, Melee Combat d6/Clubs d10, Perception d6/Investigation d8, Survival d6/Urban Jungle d8, Unarmed Combat d6/Brawling d8

Description The beat cop can be your best friend or your worst enemy. He knows a lot about the neighborhood: who to talk to, where the action is, and how to best mess with you. If you're lucky, the beat cop is an honest bloke just doing his job. This is a guy you can trust, even if he is your enemy. If he's on the take, however, that's a whole different situation, because he can come at you sideways, crooked as the day is long, and still have the law backing him up.

Librarian

Agi d4 **Str** d4 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d8, **Wil** d6; **Init** d6 + d8; **LP** 10

Traits Fragile d4, Higher Education d4, Impaired Senses (Sight) d2, Memorable d6

Skills Discipline d6/Concentration d8, Drive d6, Influence d6/Administration d10, Knowledge d6/Library Stacks d10/Research d8, Perception d6/Investigation d8/Library Search d10

Description No one knows his library as well as the helpful librarian with the granny-glasses. The Liberian's knowledge and ability to find rare and helpful texts and books is almost uncanny at times.

The librarian might be a cranky, elderly woman or she could be an attractive young woman who unintentionally hides her beauty under a thick pair of glasses. Either one knows the Dewey Decimal system inside and out and can be invaluable when conducting research.

Local Celebrity

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d6 **Wil** d8; **Init** d6 + d8; **LP** 14

Traits Addiction d4, Allure d6, Contacts d4, Talented d6 (Performance/Acting, Performance/Oratory)

Skills Artistry d4, Athletics d6/Pilates d8, Discipline d6/Morale d8, Drive d6, Influence d6, Knowledge d6, Perception d6, Performance d6/Acting d10/Oratory d10

Description The local celebrity can actually be a number of things: Someone who was on a reality TV show, a do-gooder thrust into the spotlight for his 15 minutes of fame, a politician, a big-time chef, or even a TV sports broadcaster or talk-radio personality. Usually their talent or connections are such that they tend to be a big fish in their small, local pond. They can get into the best clubs and restaurants, where a table is always waiting for them and usually are invited to the best functions and parties in town. Outside their circles, however,their influence and power lessens.

Mechanic

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d6 **Int** d6 **Wil** d8; **Init** d6 + d6; **LP** 16

Skills Drive d4, Influence d4, Mechanic d6/Cars d8, Perception d4, Tech d2

Description These statistics are just as useful for a middle aged grease monkey in overalls as they are for a spaceport mechanic in a shiny jumpsuit or even a Victorian-era inventor. No Traits are provided, but the natural choices include Attuned to Technology, Good Natured, Tough, and Crude.

Obnoxious Drunk

Agi d4 **Str** d6 **Vit** d4 **Ale** d6 **Int** d6, **Wil** d8; **Init** d4 + d6; **LP** 12

Traits Addiction (Alcoholic) d10, Crude d4, Rebellious d4, Smart Ass d4

Skills Covert d6, Discipline d6/Morale d8, Influence d6/Beg d8/Taunt d8, Melee Weapon d6/Broken Bottle d8, Survival d6/Urban Jungle d8, Unarmed Combat d6

Description The drunk might be a rowdy barfly or a broken person who has fallen into the bottle so deep he's living on the streets in cardboard boxes begging for change. While these individuals are either hated or pitied, they often have a perspective that is completely unique.

Priest

Agi d8 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d6, **Wil** d8; **Init** d8 + d8; **LP** 14

Traits Brawler d4, Contrarian d6, Duty (The Church) d10, Faith d10, Higher Education d4

Skills Artistry d6/Writing d8, Athletics d6/Dodge d6, Discipline d6/Morale d10, Influence d6/Administration d8/Coversation d10/Persuasion d10, Knowledge d6/Religion d10, Medicine d4, Perception d6/Empathy d10/Intuition d8, Performance d6/Oratory d10, Unarmed Combat d6/Boxing d12

Description The priest is a noble and virtuous man of the faith who is always there to listen to your woes and offer sound, honorable advice. He's also not one to put up with any guff or back talk and is as tough as any drill sergeant you might meet. In addition to this normal church duties, he runs a soup kitchen for the homeless, helps organize fund raisers for battered women and children, and can often be found at the gym, where he teaches boxing to the young men of the neighborhood.

Street Musician

Agi d8 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d6 **Wil** d8; **Init** d8 + d8; **LP** 12

Traits Talented (Performance/Singing, Perception/Empathy) d4

Skills Artistry d6, Athletics d4, Discipline d4, Influence d6, Perception d6/Empathy d8, Performance d6/Play Instrument (Pick One) d8/Singing d8, Survival d6, Unarmed Combat d6

Description Urban bard, street musicians dot the corners and parks of the urban landscape, playing music for the passing masses hoping they will like what they hear and donate whatever change or loose bills might be in their pockets. Some are college kids, looking to make some beer money while others make a living hoping for the occasional real gig. Still others just use it for practice.

Street Thug

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d6 **Int** d6 **Wil** d6; **Init** d6 + d6; **LP** 16

Traits Addiction d4, Brawler d4, Convict d6, Hideout d6, Rebellious d4

Skills Athletics d6/Dodge d8, Covert d6/Stealth d8/Streetwise d8, Drive d6, Guns d6/Pistol d8, Influence d6/Intimidate d8, Mechanic d6/Automobile Repair d8/Hotwiring d10, Melee Weapons d6/Club d8/Knife d8, Perception d6, Survival d4, Unarmed Combat d6/Brawling d8

Description An urban warrior, the street thug makes a living on the pain of others. He sells drugs and assaults likely targets. Street thugs often try to work with others—as much as their greed and lack of morality will allow, of course—whether it's with a partner, a small group of the "neighborhood guys," or an organized gang.

Tribal Warrior

Agi d8 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d6 **Wil** d6; **Init** d8 + d6; **LP** 16

Traits Attuned to Nature d4, Brawler d4, Duty (Sentinel) d8, Formidable Presence d2, Out for Blood d4

Skills Animals d6, Artistry d6, Athletics d6/Climbing d8/Dodge d8/Running d10, Covert d6/Camouflage d8, Craft d6/Simple Weapons d10, Medicine d4, Melee Weapons d6/Spear d10, Perception d6/Tracking d10, Ranged Weapons d6/Blowgun d10, Survival d6/Jungle d10/Poisons d8, Unarmed Combat d6/Brawling d8

Description Defenders of the tribe and hunters, the tribal warrior jealously watches the lands of his tribe and the people of his village or clan. Despite the simplicity of his weapons, the tribal warrior, laden with unusual piercings and intricate tattoos, is a fierce and proficient soldier and tracker.

Waitress

Agi d8 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d6, **Wil** d6; **Init** d8 + d8; **LP** 12

Traits Broke d4, Friends in Strange Places d2, Good Natured d4

Skills Influence d6/Conversation d8, Perception d6/Empathy d8/Read Lips d8/Streetwise d8, Performance d6, Survival d6/Urban Jungle d8, Unarmed Combat d4

Description She's your favorite waitress at the local coffee shop, and she's any pulp detective's best friend. Not only does she know the skinny on the street, she sure is good for an ear-bending when things are down. She might be willing to get you a hot plate of food or a decent cup of coffee on the house when your pockets are empty, but one day she might need a favor in return.

Extraordinary Personalities

Child Prodigy

Agi d6 **Str** d4 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d6 **Int** d10 **Wil** d8; **Init** d6 + d6; **LP** 10

Traits Overconfident d4, Photographic Memory d8, Trusting d6

Skills Athletics d6/Climbing d8/Dodge d8/Jumping d8, Covert d6/Hide d10, Craft d4, Knowledge d6, Perception d6, Unarmed Combat d4. A child prodigy usually has at least one Specialty Skill at d12, either Knowledge, Athletics, or Performance.

Description The child prodigy is a common character in books, film, and television. This sidekick is sometimes comic relief, but can also be a source of drama for more mainstream heroic characters. An adventurous archaeologist or vigilante crime fighter might adopt a young boy to help him with various errands and tasks. A prodigy might be the daughter or son of a member of a starship crew who discovers his talents as the ship explores regions unknown.

The child prodigy can be an interesting avenue for plots and adventures. He might drive the story forward or help others get out of trouble with their abilities or unique insights. Clever Game Masters will also occasionally use them against player characters, such as when a villain might kidnap or manipulate the child into doing something they shouldn't.

Circus Freak

Agi d10 **Str** d8 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d6 **Int** d6 **Wil** d8; **Init** d10 + d6; **LP** 14

Traits Varies based on the specific kind of freak, but usually including Contacts (Carnies), Memorable, Reputation, Talented, and Ugly. Most freaks have one outstanding or quirky Asset.

Skills Athletics d6, Covert d6, Influence d4, Perception d4, Performance d6, plus three to four Specialty Skills relating to the role (like Athletics/Weightlifting, Covert/Contortion, or Performance/Fire Eating).

Description The life of the sideshow circus freak is one of oddities and the bizarre, and is typically a transient lifestyle sometimes filled with violent fear of the unknown and unusual. The Bearded Lady, the Wolf-Boy, the Tattooed Man, the Lizard-Man/Lion-Woman, the Tiny-Man or Giant-Woman—all are among the menagerie of the traveling carnival and circus.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, circus freaks were treated as sub-human, with many folk believing that they were things twisted by the dark powers of the Devil. It was only in traveling carnivals and the like that they managed to find some level of social acceptance, even if it was only to be gawked at for a small admission fee.

Creepy Psychic

Agi d4 **Str** d4 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d12 **Int** d8 **Wil** d10; **Init** d4 + d12; **LP** 10

Traits Enhanced Senses (Empathy) d6, Faith d6, Memorable d6, Short d2, Uncommon Knowledge d8

Skills Artistry d4, Discipline d6/Concentration d10, Influence d6, Knowledge d6/Folklore d8/Philosophy d8/Theology d10, Medicine d6, Perception d6/Empathy d10/Intuition d8

Description Sometimes places are filled with the darkness of past deeds and those who have gone on, but never departed. The creepy psychic helps clean such places and usher those who have stayed to someplace beyond.

The creepy psychic is a small woman, about four feet tall, slightly overweight with an oddly textured, southern-accented voice. Her eyes are piercing, looking through or beyond the obvious.

By using Alertness + Perception/Empathy + Enhanced Senses Trait, the creepy psychic can look beyond the world we see to the flows and ebbs of the supernatural, feeling the hearts—both dark and light—of a place. By using Alertness + Perception/Intuition + Enhanced Senses Trait, the creepy psychic can look into a

person, reading into their lives and emotions. Alternately, she could just be making all of this up, depending on your purposes.

Cult Leader

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d8 **Wil** d10; **Init** d6 + d8; **LP** 14

Traits Faith d6, Natural Leader d8, Overconfident d6, Paranoid d4, Sadistic d12, Shadow d6

Skills Artistry d6/Writing d8, Athletics d4, Covert d6/Stealth d8, Discipline d6, Drive d6, Guns d4, Influence d6/Conversation d8/Intimidation d12/Persuasion d10/Seduction d8, Knowledge d6, Perception d6, Performance d6

Description Few approach the deprivation and darkness of a cult leader. The cult leader is responsible for seducing others into acts of murder, sex, and other illegal and amoral activities. The cult's followers are blinded to the leader's sadistic nature, only seeing the power and twisted charisma, desiring to be as close as they can.

The cult leader is an anachronism in the fact that he is often able to hide from the public, such as law-enforcement, yet still incites the fanatic loyalty of others. When they are caught, there are those who have the power over their flock to commit mass suicide, while others hide from justice behind their followers, letting them take the fall for their misdeeds.

Femme Fatale

Agi d8 **Str** d4 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d6 **Wil** d8; **Init** d8 + d8; **LP** 14

Traits Allure d8, Contacts d4, Criminal Past d6, Greedy d4

Skills Artistry d6/Appraisal d8, Covert d6/Forgery d8/Open Locks d8/Sleight of Hand d8/Stealth d10, Drive d4, Guns d6, Influence d6/Seduction d10, Melee Weapons d4, Perception d4, Performance d6/Acting d8, Unarmed Combat d4

Description She's not bad—she's just drawn that way. The femme fatale is a highly skilled, flamboyant, capable individual with an air of seductive darkness that lures in the innocent and easily-swayed. She's the foil for any hero, although she may have a heart of gold and just needs to be shown the error of her ways. Of course, she may also be a ruthless assassin beyond redemption.

The femme fatale doesn't have to be female; with a little tinkering, it's the lothario who haunts smoky clubs seeking to throw a wrench in the works of the female protagonist. Add a few supernatural traits, and the femme fatale is a vampire, a ghost, or maybe even a shape-shifter.

Gang Leader

Agi d6 **Str** d8 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d8 **Int** d6 **Wil** d6; **Init** d6 + d8; **LP** 14

Traits Born Behind the Wheel d4, Brawler d4, Contacts d4, Criminal Past d6, Infamy (Authorities) d4, Rank and Privilege d4, Reputation (Criminals) d4, Signature Item d2, Tough d4

Skills Athletics d4, Covert d6/Streetwise d10, Discipline d6/Leadership d8, Drive d6/Motorcycle d10, Guns d6/Pistols d8, Influence d6/Intimidate d8, Melee Weapons d6, Perception d4, Unarmed Combat d6

Description This is the leader of the pack, the one the other gang members respect or fear. He got there by force of personality as well as force of physicality, so he's a dangerous customer. Other gangsters, thugs, and heavies surround him at all times. He entertains his peers in nightclubs or dark alley streets. You don't usually get to meet this guy until you've really caused a stir, but chances are he'll send his mooks after you if you manage to get on his bad side.

Mad Scientist

Agi d6 **Str** d4 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d12 **Wil** d10; **Init** d6 + d8; **LP** 16

Traits Absent Minded d4, Animal Enmity d2, Attuned to Technology d8, Coward d4, Dead Inside d4, Glory Hound d4, Head for Numbers d4, Higher Education d4, Insatiable Curiosity d6, Intuitive Leaps d4, Loyal Companion (Lab Assistant) d8, Neatfreak d4, Uncommon Knowledge d6, Unstable d4

Skills Covert d4, Craft d4, Discipline d4, Guns d2, Influence d4, Knowledge d6, Mechanic d6, Science d6/Life Sciences d10/Math d10/Physics d10, Tech d6

Description Crazy—that's what they called him. He earned multiple post-graduate degrees, achieved numerous patents, and became published in countless journals … then went off his rocker. Perhaps he lost his mind earlier. Whatever the case, now he's determined to prove the world wrong and undermine the academic and scholarly community. They'll see, when he produces his Freeze Ray, Killer Robot, or Orbiting Mind Control Satellite. Oh yes, they will see. And so will the cute girl from the laundrymat.

Majordomo

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d6 **Int** d8 **Wil** d8; **Init** d6 + d6; **LP** 12

Traits Allure d4, Rank & Privilege ("Number Two") d6, Steady Calm d6

Skills Athletics d6, Covert d6/Stealth d8/Streetwise d10, Discipline d6, Drive d6, Guns d6/Pistol d10, Influence d6/Conversation d10, Knowledge d6, Perception d6/Tactics d8, Pilot d6/Helicopter d10, Survival d6, Unarmed Combat d6

Description The majordomo is the "number two" guy, the right hand of the villain. He typically has the trust of his master, keeping his secrets and aiding him in forming and executing the villain's twisted machinations. However, it is not uncommon for the villain's most trusted agent to turn against his master at some point. Perhaps he falls in love with the beautiful heroine, or perhaps the master insults his sense of honor in some way.

Private Detective

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d10 **Int** d6 **Wil** d10; **Init** d6 + d10; **LP** 18

Traits Addiction (Nicotine, Alcohol) d6, Allure d2, Brawler d2, Contacts d4, Danger Sense d4, Dead Broke d4, Intuitive Leaps d4, Rank and Privilege d2, Rotten Luck d4, Tough d4

Skills Artistry d4, Athletics d4, Covert d6/Open Locks d10/Stealth d10/Streetwise d10, Discipline d6/Interrogation d8/Resistance d8, Drive d6, Guns d6/Pistols d8, Influence d6/Persuasion d8/Seduction d8, Knowledge d6/Law d10, Perception d6/Deduction d10, Unarmed Combat d6

Description He's the gumshoe down on his luck, working out of a cheap office in Midtown, or that guy who makes his living on retainer with affluent clients. He could be ex-police, a war veteran, or even a former crime novelist who realized he could use his talents in other ways. The private detective is a great supporting character, but his Rotten Luck could bring trouble. It's a good thing he can take a few knocks.

Psycho Killer

Agi d8 **Str** d8 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d8 **Wil** d10; **Init** d8 + d8; **LP** 16

Traits Dead Inside d6, Devoted to a Cause d6, Eerie Presence d6, In Plain Sight d6, Out for Blood d4, Shadow d6, Traumatic Flashes d4, Unstable d6

Skills Artistry d6, Athletics d6/Dodge d8, Covert d6/Open Locks d8/Sabotage d10/Stealth d10/Streetwise d10, Craft d4, Discipline d6/Concentration d10, Drive d4, Influence d4, Knowledge d6/Philosophy d8, Medicine d4, Melee Weapons d6/Knives d8, Perception d6, Unarmed Combat d6

Description Whether he's a masked boogeyman stalking kids at a lakeside camp or a quiet, coldly-calculating businessman who murders people in the evenings, the psycho killer is broken in the head. He has an insatiable desire to kill, a cause that motivates him beyond anything else. He can be driven to bouts of anger, but he's usually methodical. Something happened to him when he was younger—so horrible it has scarred him for life. Whatever his irrational impulses, they make him one of the most terrifying individuals to encounter when the gloves are off and the sharp implements are raised.

Rock Star

Agi d6 **Str** d6 **Vit** d6 **Ale** d8 **Int** d6 **Wil** d8; **Init** d6 + d8; **LP** 14

Traits Addiction (pick one) d6, Allure d4, Glory Hound d6, Reputation d6, Talented (Performance/Guitar, Performance/Singing) d6

Skills Artistry d6/Songwriting d8, Athletics d4, Drive d4, Guns d4, Influence d6/Conversation d8/Persuasion d8/Seduction d8, Perception d4, Performance d6/Dancing d10/Guitar d10/Singing d10

Description Since he's signed with the big record labels, this character has been a multimillionaire. He's the celebrity of the moment and surrounded by sycophants, security, and sexy women. It may once have been about the music, but now it's about the lifestyle. It's going to be a long way down when his sun is eclipsed by the next big sensation.

Violent Commando

Agi d8 **Str** d10 **Vit** d10 **Ale** d8 **Int** d6 **Wil** d10; **Init** d8 + d8; **LP** 24

Traits Attuned to Nature d4, Brawler d6, Contrarian d4, Duty (Man-o-War) d8, Natural Athlete d6, Tough d4, Traumatic Flashbacks d6

Skills Athletics d6/Dodge d10, Covert d6/Camouflage d10/Stealth d10, Craft d6/Weaponry d8, Discipline d6/Resistance d12, Drive d6/Combat Vehicle d8, Guns d6/Rifles d10/Shotgun d8/SMG d10, Heavy Weapons d6/Demolitions d8/Rocket Launcher d10, Influence d6/Intimidation d10/Leadership d8, Mechanic d6, Medicine d6/First Aid d10, Melee Weapons d6/Knife d10, Perception d6/Intuition d8/Tactics d10, Ranged Weapons d6/Bows d10, Survival d6/Jungle d12/Mountains d8, Unarmed Combat d6/Judo d8

Description The violent commando served his country with distinction and honor. When he came home he found himself abandoned, reviled, and hated by the government he so proudly went to war for and by the citizens he sought to defend.

The violent commando only wants to find the peace he lost in war. He wants only to be left alone and live his life as others—but it seems he is doomed to live a life of violence. Perhaps it is a personal injustice, such as being arrested and mistreated simply for being a transient. Perhaps he's come home to find his town under the thumb of a local big shot. Or perhaps the government that was so eager to dismiss him needs him for one last mission. Whatever the case, it is not in the violent commando to ignore the call of duty.

The violent commando suffers from his years of war and combat. He has seen and experienced the worst humanity has to offer. Sometimes things he has to deal with trigger remembrances of the past, which can sometimes cause him—and more importantly, others—no small amount of pain and trouble.

AFTERWORD

or "I Didn't Design Anything"

by Jamie Chambers

The book you are now reading was created, quite literally, by popular demand. A few years ago, a new game company called Margaret Weis Productions, Ltd.—newly created by the former staff of Sovereign Press—published a role playing game based on a science-fiction film, *Serenity*. This was at a point when games based on the rules of a certain mega-popular fantasy RPG were all the rage, and our company was known for making products using those rules. Everything seemed to revolve around dice that had 20 sides. But with everyone around me telling me I was crazy, I decided to go in another direction. I took a game system that our old company had abandoned years ago, stripped it down to the frame, and rebuilt it.

The success and response to those products is what we've built everything else on our company around, and I was extremely surprised when many fans talked about how they loved the game system as much as the setting and characters from that first product. What began as a one-time experiment became the "house" RPG engine for MWP.

Some folks out on cyberspace have accused me of ripping off the designs of other games, or even taking credit of the work of others. I wanted to take this opportunity to set the record straight … by 'fessing up—kind of. Truth is, I didn't design anything.

I'm an RPG junkie. I own far more game systems than I'll ever play, and it would bore you to tears for me to even list everything I've tried over the years. I've enjoyed hack-and-slash dungeon crawl games, diceless RPGs that had almost no rules to speak of, simulationist games that had rules to cover nearly everything, fast-playing games that are all about action, and pure humor games that were mostly there to make me laugh. While some games suited my tastes more than others, each of them threw something tasty into the stewpot of my brain.

Back in the late 1990s I was invited to be a small part of the *Sovereign Stone* RPG, with game rules designed by Lester Smith. I felt an instant connection with the game. The basic mechanics were simple, yet the game had enough depth that even an RPG addict like me didn't feel like I was playing something too simple. It satisfied my love of rolling different polyhedrals yet had a fast pace that left a lot of other games in the dust.

As much as I loved the original Sovereign Stone, it got overwhelmed by the big fantasy RPG juggernaut. Shortly after becoming full-time with Margaret's company, I recommended that we change the rules to accommodate those damn 20-sided dice. Suddenly the Sovereign Stone setting and storyline worked with mainstream gaming, and it sold well for several years. And while I'm very proud of the work I did, part of me felt like I "sold out" by switching game engines.

I had a chance for redemption when I got the golden opportunity to write and design the *Serenity Role Playing Game*. Lester's ridiculously simple yet endlessly fun Attribute + Skill game mechanic seemed to be the ticket for fast-paced storytelling, and I wanted to go even farther than the old game did and really emphasize character and story. Attributes were changed, the nature of Traits was altered, the idea of Plot Points and story manipulation was added, general Skills and specialties were incorporated, and the combat rules were thoroughly re-tooled. And not a single idea is something innovative or brand new, they are ideas I had seen in many of the games I have played and loved over the years.

The end result was a game that perfectly matches my preferred style of play. The emphasis is on the story, the rules offer incentives for players to play up the bad about their characters as well as the good, the pace is fast, and combat is exciting and dangerous. After a few more incarnations, we present it here as a universal game system you can use for any setting and story you desire.

In his Preface, Lester used a cooking analogy—which really fits. I took the original *Sovereign Stone* recipe and then modified it using ingredients from dozens of other games. But the end result is something that I believe tastes a little bit different. Enjoy.

Name:
Concept:
Race:
Description:

Attributes

Agility: Alertness:

Strength: Intelligence:

Vitality: Willpower:

Derived Attributes

Life Points (Vit+Wil):

Initiative (Agi+Ale):

Endurance (Vit+Wil):

Resistance (Vit+Vit):

Action Difficulty

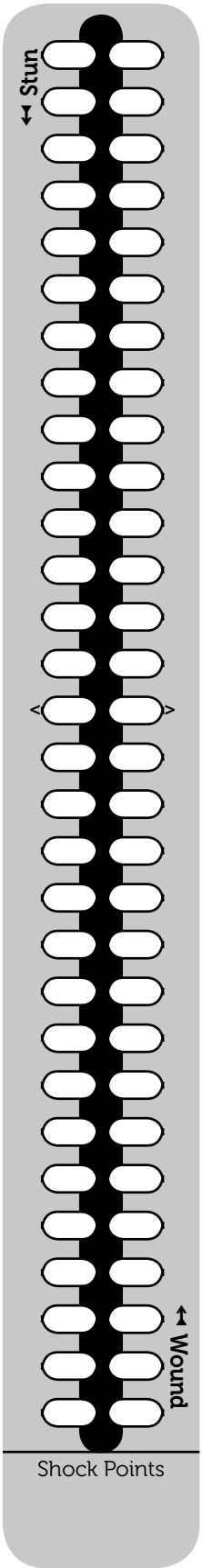
Action	Diff/Extrordinary
Easy	3 / 10
Average	7 / 14
Hard	11 / 18
Formidable	15 / 22
Heroic	19 / 26
Incredible	23 / 30
Ridiculous	27 / 34
Impossible	31 / 38

Advancement Points

Advancement Costs

Point Type	AP Cost
1 Attribute Point	8
1 Trait Point	7
1 Skill Point	3

Current Plot Points



General and Specialty Skills

Animals

Artistry

Athletics

Covert

Craft

Discipline

Drive

Guns

Heavy Weapons

Influence

Knowledge

Mechanic*

Medicine*

Melee Weapons

Perception

Performance

Pilot*

Ranged Weapons

Science*

Survival

Tech*

Unarmed Combat

**Skilled only*

Assets

Complications

Weapons

Type: Damage:
Range: Ammo:

Type: Damage:
Range: Ammo:

Type: Damage:
Range: Ammo:

Gear

History

Armor

Type:
Armor Rating:
Covers:
Penalty:
Special Notes:

Plot Points and Die Steps

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
d2	d4	d6	d8	d10	d12	d12+d2	d12+d4	d12+d6	d12+d8	d12+d10	d12+d12

Name

Concept

Description

Attributes

Agility:		Alertness:	
Strength:		Intelligence:	
Vitality:		Willpower:	

Derived Attributes

Initiative:	
Endurance:	
Life Points:	
Resistance:	

Action Difficulty

Action	Diff/Extrordinary
Easy	3 / 10
Average	7 / 14
Hard	11 / 18
Formidable	15 / 22
Heroic	19 / 26
Incredible	23 / 30
Ridiculous	27 / 34
Impossible	31 / 38

Advancement Points

Point Type	AP Cost
1 Attribute Step	16
1 Trait Step	14
1 Skill Step	6

Weapons

Type:		Damage:	
Range:		Ammo:	
Type:		Damage:	
Range:		Ammo:	

Armor

Type:		Covers:	
Rating:		Penalty:	

Stun

Wound

Shock Points

CORTEX™

General and Specialty Skills

Animals	Influence	Science*
Artistry	Knowledge	Survival
Athletics	Mechanic*	Tech*
Covert	Medicine*	Unarmed Combat
Craft	Melee Weapons	
Discipline	Perception	
Drive	Performance	
Guns	Pilot*	
Heavy Weapons	Ranged Weapons	

*Skilled only

Assets

Name:
Description:

Name:
Description:

Name:
Description:

Name:
Description:

Name:
Description:

Complications

Name:
Description:

Name:
Description:

Name:
Description:

Name:
Description:

Name:
Description:

Gear

History

Plot Points and Die Steps

Current Plot Points	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	d2	d4	d6	d8	d10	d12	d12+d2	d12+d4	d12+d6	d12+d8	d12+d10	d12+d12

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CORTEX™ Core Rules

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...Cortex Power

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